

Hafa Adai!

UA flight cancellations seen to have minimal impact on NMI. **PAGE 3**
House pays tribute to Ogumoro for 50 years of service. **PAGE 5**

\$1

Saipan Tribune

THE CNMI'S FIRST DAILY NEWSPAPER

Volume XXXI, Issue No. 257

www.saipantribune.com

TUESDAY DECEMBER 28, 2021

www.facebook.com/saipantribune

2 more COVID-related deaths

» 40 new cases ID'd; 13 hospitalized

By JOSHUA SANTOS
joshua_santos@saipantribune.com
REPORTER

Two deaths were added to the grim toll of COVID-19 fatalities in the CNMI, with the 11th COVID-19 related fatality reported late Sunday night and the 12th fatality reported yesterday.

At the same time, 40 new positive cases were confirmed positive for COVID-19 on Dec. 24 and 25, 2021, bringing the CNMI total to 2,893 cases since March 28, 2020.

It was only two days ago when the CNMI's death toll from COVID-19 recorded its ninth and 10th fatalities on

See DEATHS on Page 4

'Some DOC staff working 16-hour shifts'



The former Mango Resort in Koblerville is undergoing renovation right now to turn the site into a quarantine facility. The renovations started back in November; its target completion date of construction is January 2022.

KIMBERLY B. ESMORES

By KIMBERLY B. ESMORES
kimberly_esmores@saipantribune.com
REPORTER

What remains of Department of Corrections staff have been spread thin due to the lack of manpower after a handful of officers tested positive for COVID-19.

According to a source who works at Corrections, he and others have been working over 12 hours at a time after a good chunk of their staff tested positive for COVID-19.

"We're spread so thin now. I have colleagues who are working over 16-hour shifts just to cover for those who are

See DOC on Page 4

Federal program offers cash to cover COVID-19 funeral costs

By STEVE LeBLANC
ASSOCIATED PRESS

BOSTON (AP)—When Wanda Olson's son-in-law died in March after contracting CO-



UNDER THE SEA

Ayano Braxton appears to be riding this bike she found at the bottom of the waters off Obyan Beach while scuba diving last Christmas Eve.

SUPER FISH DIVING

VID-19, she and her daughter had to grapple with more than just their sudden grief. They had to come up with money for a cremation.

Even without a funeral, the

bill came to nearly \$2,000, a hefty sum that Olson initially covered. She and her daughter then learned of a federal program that reimburses families

See FEDERAL on Page 4

AT A GLANCE

As of 6:15pm, Dec. 27, 2021

VACCINATIONS IN THE CNMI

Eligible Population Fully Vaccinated: **93.6%**

Days since last community transmission **2**

Pfizer/BioNTech	
Initiated:	36,491
Fully Vaccinated:	34,376
Moderna	
Initiated:	5,274
Fully Vaccinated:	4,839
Janssen	
Fully vaccinated:	1,117

GUAM	OLD	NEW	TOTAL
Positive	19,432	26	19,458
Recovered	18,913	36	18,949
Active	213	26	239
Deaths	270	0	270

SAIPAN	OLD	NEW	TOTAL
Positive	2,853	40	2,893
Traced via Travel Screening	303	2	305
Traced via Community Screening	2,550	38	2,588
Deaths	10	2	12

Source: Joint Information Center - Guam, Commonwealth Healthcare Corp., <https://www.vaccinatecnmi.com/vax-dashboard/>

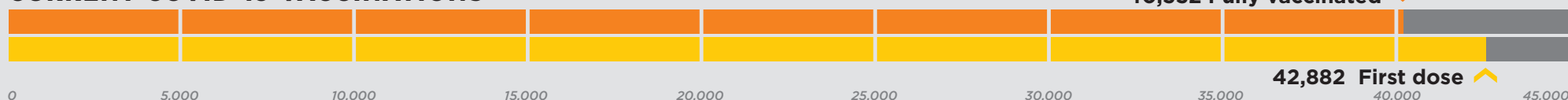
COMMUNITY VULNERABILITY

LEGEND:

- Red: Least safe
- Orange
- Yellow
- Blue
- Green: Safest

Source: Office of the Governor

CURRENT COVID-19 VACCINATIONS



INSIDE



BUSINESS

The COVID-19 variant is upending holiday plans but did not do much damage to shopping.

PAGE 11



ASIA

Photos of a Christmas Eve massacre in eastern Myanmar is fueling outrage against the military.

PAGE 13



LIFE & STYLE

"Spider-Man: No Way Home" stayed in the No. 1 spot and crossed the \$1 billion mark globally.

PAGE 15



SCAN ME WITH A COMPATIBLE QR READER TO KEEP UPDATED ON ALL THE LATEST NEWS.



GOT A NEWS TIP?

TEL: 235-6397 / 235-2440 FAX: 235-3740 EMAIL: editor@saipantribune.com

Local

COVID-19 therapeutics available

» **Others to be brought to CNMI soon**

By JOSHUA SANTOS
joshua_santos@saipantribune.com
REPORTER

With the increasing number of positive COVID-19 cases in the CNMI, the Commonwealth Healthcare Corp. assures that it has several COVID-19 therapeutics available, with several others going through processing and being prepared for transport to CHCC.

During a virtual news briefing yesterday, CHCC pharmacy manager Rodylyn Bacani said that CHCC currently has 400 vials of REGEN-COV for monoclonal antibody treatment of COVID-19. So far, CHCC has received 1,000 vials of REGEN-COV since August this year and has administered 561 courses of the treatment to eligible patients.

Another MAB treatment available through CHCC is Bamlanivimab and Etesevimab. Bacani said that CHCC currently has 104 course units available.

Called BAM/ETE, the U.S. Food and Drug Administration granted the emergency use authorization of Bamlanivimab

and Etesevimab used together to treat mild to moderate COVID-19 in COVID-positive adult and pediatric patients who are at high risk of progression to severe COVID-19.

Bacani said that 72 vials of Sotrovimab arrived yesterday. The FDA granted EUA for Sotrovimab in May this year. According to an FDA fact sheet, Sotrovimab is used for the treatment of mild to moderate COVID-19 in COVID-positive adult and pediatric patients—12 years old and older and weighing at least 40 kilograms—who are at high risk of progression to severe COVID-19.

Also available through CHCC is the antiviral drug Remdesivir. Bacani said that CHCC currently has 100 vials of the treatment, and that 240 vials have been used so far.

In October last year, the FDA approved Remdesivir for use in adult and pediatric patients 12 years old or older and weighing at least 40 kilograms for COVID-19 treatment requiring hospitalization. According to the FDA website, Remdesivir is the first COVID-19 treatment to receive FDA approval.

For other therapeutics, Bacani said that supplies of

Evusheld, Molnupiravir, and Paxlovid are now being processed and prepared for transport to CHCC.

Evusheld, which was developed by AstraZeneca, was granted EUA in early December for use as a pre-exposure prophylaxis in select adults and pediatric individuals.

Molnupiravir and Paxlovid were granted EUA last week for use in adult and pediatric patients 12 years old or older and weighing at least 40 kilograms for COVID-19 treatment requiring hospitalization.

CHCC chief executive officer Esther L. Muña, who participated in the virtual news briefing yesterday, made clear that these treatments are not replacements for COVID-19 vaccines.

She also said that determining whether or not you qualify for these therapeutics is a discussion that needs to happen between you and your medical provider, and added that CHCC is working to get these therapeutics to immunocompromised individuals receiving treatment through CHCC.

The CHCC pharmacy is responsible for the ordering, procuring, and maintaining of the CNMI's COVID-19 therapeutics.



WE'RE HIRING! EXPERIENCED COOKS

Apply today!

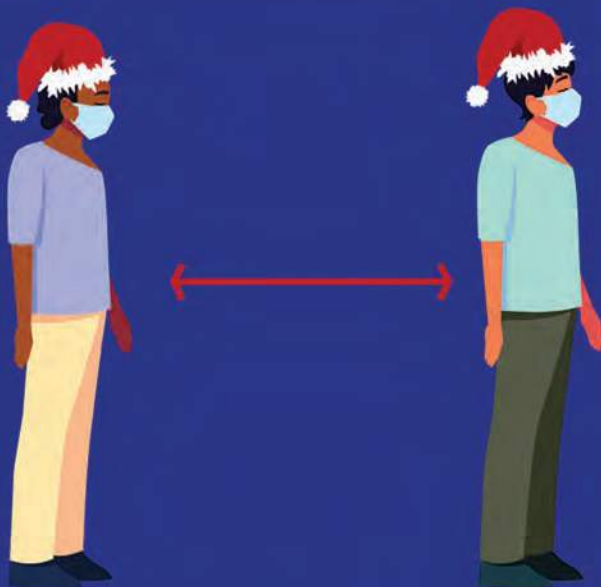
APPLY IN PERSON: TRIPLE J CORPORATE OFFICE
or Email: hrtjsaipan@triplejsaipan.com **NO PHONE CALLS**
Triple J offers competitive benefits and is an Equal Opportunity Employer.



How to gather safely during the holidays



WATCH YOUR DISTANCE



Stay **6 feet away** from others, especially around individuals who are not in your household.

Remember that some people without symptoms may be able to spread virus.

Learn more at
www.staysafecnmi.com/livecovidsafe.



@cnmichcc | www.chcc.gov.mp

UA flight cancellations seen to have minimal impact on NMI

By **KIMBERLY B. ESMORES**
kimberly_esmores@saipantribune.com
REPORTER

The Commonwealth Ports Authority said the CNMI will experience minimal impact as a result of United Airlines'

CHCC continues to prepare for more cases, hospitalizations

By **JOSHUA SANTOS**
joshua_santos@saipantribune.com
REPORTER

Commonwealth Healthcare Corp. chief executive officer Esther L. Muña assured yesterday that CHCC continues to prepare for possible increases in positive cases of COVID-19 and hospitalizations.

In a virtual news briefing alongside CHCC pharmacy manager Rodylyn Bacani, Muña said that CHCC has regular contact with health care providers to ensure that they have all necessary support to do their jobs and fully help patients. Muña said she and CHCC have concern for the health of every single person hospitalized, and that hospitalization numbers in the double-digits is "troubling to see."

Right now, there are 13 patients who are hospitalized due to COVID-19, with eight being treated at the hospital and

cancellation of flights.

In a brief statement from CPA chair Kimberlyn King-Hinds, she said that United's flight crew in the Marianas is based in Guam, so the CNMI will experience minimal

impact from United's flight cancellations. "In our communications with United, the impact to this region is minimal given that the flight crew is based out of Guam. At this time, we are not experiencing any cancellations as a result of [the COVID-19 variant] omicron," she said.

According to an email from

United Corporate Communications to *Saipan Tribune*, the spike in omicron cases has greatly impacted its flight crew, resulting in cancellation of numerous flights but the most impacted area will be the U.S. domestic market.

"The nationwide spike in omicron cases this week has had a direct impact on our

flight crews and the people who run our operation. As a result, we've unfortunately had to cancel some flights and are notifying impacted customers in advance of them coming to the airport. We're sorry for the disruption and are working hard to rebook as many people as possible and get them on

their way for the holidays," United told *Saipan Tribune*.

According to a Guam media source, United is one of many other airlines in the United States that have started canceling hundreds of flights over the weekend due to staffing issues caused by the spread of the new COVID-19 variant, omicron.

DOJ will award more than \$21M to prevent and respond to hate crimes

WASHINGTON—The Department of Justice announced last week that the Office of Justice Programs will award more than \$21 million to investigate and prosecute hate crimes and assist hate crime victims.

Funding will help state, local and tribal agencies and community organizations address an alarming rise in violent and property crimes committed on the basis of race, color, national origin, sexual orientation, gender, gender identity or disability.

"Hate crimes instill fear across entire communities. They have profoundly negative and unacceptable effects on our society," said associate attorney general Vanita Gupta. "The department is committed to using all tools at our disposal to combat unlawful

acts of hate. These awards will provide state, local and tribal agencies additional support and critical resources to address hate crimes and their far-reaching effects."

This announcement comes on the 12th anniversary of the enactment of the Matthew Shepard and James Byrd Jr. Hate Crimes Prevention Act, signed into law by President Barack Obama in 2009. Shepard, a gay 21-year-old Wyoming man, and Byrd, a 49-year-old African-American man from Jasper, Texas, were slain in separate incidents in 1998. Shepard was beaten, tortured and left to die near Laramie, Wyoming. His killers were convicted of murder and are serving two life sentences. Byrd was tied to the back of a pickup truck by white supremacists and

dragged to his death. Two of the murderers were executed for the brutal crime. The Shepard-Byrd Hate Crimes Prevention Act enables the Justice Department to prosecute crimes motivated by race, color, religion and national origin without having to show that the victim was engaged in a federally protected activity. The Act also empowers the department to prosecute hate crimes committed because of a person's sexual orientation, gender, gender identity or disability.

OJP's Bureau of Justice Assistance is administering a new program named in honor of Shepard and Byrd. The Act makes grant funds available to improve the investigation and prosecution of hate crimes. Through the Shepard-Byrd solicitation and the related Col-

laborative Responses to Hate Crimes program that seeks to address precipitous increases in hate crimes, OJP's BJA will award \$8.4 million in site-based funding and training and technical assistance.

"Acts of violence and destruction motivated by hate and bias cause lasting harm to victims, terrorize entire communities and divide our nation, leaving deep scars and stalling the march toward equal justice," said Acting Assistant Attorney General Amy L. Solomon of OJP. "We must work together to bridge the gaps of empathy, root out intolerance in all its forms and send a clear message that the future belongs to every American, no matter what they look like, how they worship and whom they love."

See DOJ on Next Page

Hafa Adail
Saipan Tribune
THE CNMI'S FIRST DAILY NEWSPAPER

Our Platforms

FACEBOOK
Pinned FB post
FB Video
FB Stories
(Roll, Swipe Up)

WEB
Banner Ad
SkyScraper Ad
Right Title
TAGA Plus

INSTAGRAM
IG Post
IG Stories

PRINT

Call **670.235-NEWS (6397)**
to learn more opportunities.

DeLeon Guerrero files OPA request for info about retirement contributions, tax collection

By **FERDIE DE LA TORRE**
ferdie_delatorre@saipantribune.com
REPORTER

Sen. Edith DeLeon Guerrero (D-Saipan) submitted yesterday an Open Government Act request to Finance Secretary David DLG Atalig for information about current government employees' retirement contributions—or Defined Benefit Plan members' contributions—and Gross Revenue Tax collection.

In response to *Saipan Tribune's* inquiry as to the reasons for her OGA request, DeLeon Guerrero, who chairs the Saipan and Northern Islands Legislative Delegation-Judiciary and Governmental Operations Committee, said it is important to know where the CNMI now stands with respect to govern-



DeLeon Guerrero

ment employee earned interest on their prior DB plan contributions.

She also underscored the need to know if any balance remains to be paid to these prior DB plan members.

"I understand there are accounts that are in arrears, be it employee benefit programs or vendors," the senator said.

With respect to Gross Revenue Tax collection, DeLeon Guerrero said the law is explicit on what accounts are to be funded by the GRT. She said it is important to know how much of the collected GRT has been appropriated to these specific programs.

The senator said she is hoping to know how much in GRT due CNMI (if any to date) so that they know exactly where the CNMI stands with

any tax revenue intended to fund specific needs.

DeLeon Guerrero requested Atalig to provide her the account balance and payment/funding allocation status of the following:

1. Public Law 17-82 Interest Account as established by Public Law 18-56 to pay interest to active members who terminated their membership in the DB plan under P.L. 17-82, as amended by P.L. 18-02.

2. Under the same P.L. 18-56, Section 2308 Disposition of Gross Revenue Tax from a license holder to

- a. LEAC Rate Subsidy Account
- b. For the Commonwealth Healthcare Corp.
- c. For the Medical Referral Program
- d. For the payment of land compensation judgments; and
- e. Public School System

FEDERAL

From Page 1

up to \$9,000 for funeral costs for loved ones who died of COVID-19.

Olson's daughter submitted an application to the Federal Emergency Management Agency, received a deposit by June and was able to reimburse her mother the \$1,974.

"Had this not been available, we would have been paying the money ourselves," said Olson, 80, of Villa Rica, Georgia. "There wasn't any red tape. This was a very easy, well-handled process."

As of Dec. 6, about 226,000 people had shared in the nearly \$1.5 billion that FEMA has spent on funeral costs that occurred after Jan. 20, 2020, the date of the first confirmed case of COVID-19 in the U.S. With the nation's coronavirus death toll topping 800,000, it's clear that many families who are eligible for reimbursement have yet to take advantage of the funeral benefit.

Her son-in-law was traveling a lot, working on air conditioning systems in theaters, restaurants and businesses, when he began feeling ill, Olson said. After a few days at home, he went to the hospital and was put on a ventilator. He died several weeks later.

"He could never overcome it," she said.

To be eligible for reimbursement, death certificates for those who died

after May 16, 2020, must indicate that the death was attributed to COVID-19.

For deaths that occurred in the early months of the pandemic—from Jan. 20 to May 16, 2020—death certificates must be accompanied with a signed statement from a medical examiner, coroner or the certifying official listed on the certificate indicating that COVID-19 was the cause or a contributing cause of death.

The percentage of individuals who have been reimbursed varies dramatically from state to state—from nearly 40% in North Carolina and Maryland to fewer than 15% in Idaho and Oregon, according to state-by-state data compiled by FEMA.

While the reimbursement must go directly to individuals, some funeral directors have taken on the task of informing grieving families of the benefit.

After the benefit was first announced, David Shipper, owner of the Sunset Funeral Home, Cremation Center & Cemetery in Evansville, Indiana, took out ads to let people know that help was available if they qualified.

"Nine thousand dollars—that's a lot of money. We wanted to find a way to tell people about it," he said. "We stopped advertising some time ago, but when we have a new family with a death from COVID, we tell them about the program."

Workers at the home will sit down

with families, gather the needed paperwork, contact FEMA on the phone and help walk them through the process if they ask, he said.

Many families may simply be unaware of the benefit, but others may opt against seeking the cash out of reluctance to revisit the pain of the death, Shipper said. He said the better time to seek the help is when planning the funeral.

"They're much more likely to take advantage right then than if they've already spent the money and don't want to open it up again," Shipper said.

The largest states account for some of the biggest shares of the FEMA reimbursement money.

The program has paid out more than 21,000 reimbursements in California and Texas, which have both reported more than 74,000 COVID-19 deaths. Residents applied for more than \$141 million in each state.

The fewest number of reimbursements have occurred in Vermont, where 123 people were awarded a total of about \$704,000.

Expenses covered under the FEMA program include funeral services, cremation and interment, as well as the costs for caskets or urns, burial plots or cremation niches, markers or headstones, transportation or transfer of remains, clergy or officiant services, and the use of funeral home equipment or staff.

chives, DOC actually got assistance from the Department of Public Safety, which sent about 10 to 20 police officers to DOC to ease the manpower problem. Unfortunately, many of those police officers also caught the COVID-19 virus.

House of Representatives vice speaker Blas Jonathan T. Attao (R-Saipan), who disclosed the situation at a House session last week, emphasized the need to help DOC with its emergency hiring of Corrections officers to stem the worsening manpower shortage situation.

He said the proper House committee should look into this issue and look at the opportunity if there's financial assistance that could be extended to DOC.

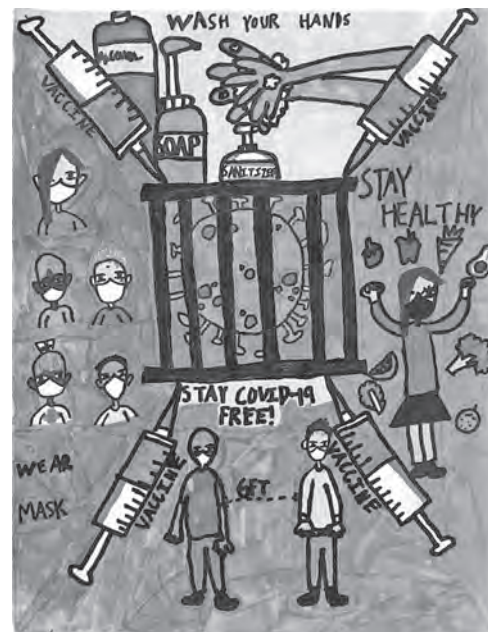
housed at the former Mango Resort in Koblerville.

Saipan Tribune learned there are about 18 rooms currently being occupied by DOC officers and DOC inmates who contracted the COVID-19 virus.

Earlier this month, about 27 rooms were occupied by DOC officers and inmates.

The renovations for Mango Resort to turn the site into a quarantine facility started back in November. The first half of the site was completed earlier this month to accommodate the inmates and officers. It was learned that the target completion date of construction is January 2022.

According to *Saipan Tribune* ar-



WINNING ARTWORK

Artwork by Pacifica Insurance Underwriters, Inc.'s 8th Annual Pacifica Art Contest category 1 winner Caysa Marchadesch from Gregorio T. Elementary School. This year's theme: "Stay COVID-19 free". For Contest information, log on to www.pacificains.com/art-contest and follow Pacifica's Facebook and Instagram accounts. Artworks are on display at their office in Supe for public viewing.

CONTRIBUTED PHOTO

DEATHS

From Page 1

Christmas Day itself.

The Commonwealth Healthcare Corp. reported that, as of Dec. 25, there have been 1,896 recoveries, 698 active cases, and eight deaths of the cases that were identified since Oct. 28.

The Governor's COVID-19 Task Force and CHCC confirmed on Sunday the CNMI's 11th COVID-19-related death, while CHCC chief executive officer Esther L. Muña confirmed the CNMI's 12th COVID-19-related death during a virtual news briefing yesterday. She said the newest fatality occurred yesterday morning. There was no immediate word on the vaccination status of the two latest fatalities.

Muña gave her condolences and assured that CHCC can provide therapeutic care for the families who have lost loved ones to COVID-19.

"We want to offer the families our sincerest condolences and sympathy. The COVID-19 pandemic has brought tremendous grief to the families, and we want to be able to speak to you about...therapeutic treatment we have that's available and will soon be available for the CNMI," she said.

Muña also expressed her gratitude

to the CNMI community for its cooperation over the course of the COVID-19 pandemic, and continued to emphasize the importance of getting vaccinated against COVID-19. For those who are unvaccinated or eligible and due for their booster shots, Muña urged them to get their shots.

Muña said yesterday that 93.6% of the CNMI's eligible population is now fully vaccinated against COVID-19. For booster shots, Muña said that over 14,400 doses have been administered.

In a CHCC news release published Sunday, it said that 40 new cases of COVID-19 were confirmed on Dec. 24 and Dec. 25. Of these 40 cases, 12 were found on Dec. 24 and 28 on Dec. 25: nine were found through contact tracing, 29 through community testing, and two through travel testing. All 40 have since been isolated and are being actively monitored. CHCC said the vaccination statuses of the 40 were pending verification as of Sunday night.

Muña said that right now, there are 13 who are at the hospital due to COVID-19. Of the 13, eight are being treated at the CHCC hospital and five are being treated at CHCC's Alternate Care Site at Kanoa Resort Saipan. By vaccination status, 10 are unvaccinated and three vaccinated. Of the 13, two are on a ventilator.

DOJ

From Page 3

BJA will also make \$1.5 million in site-based awards under the Emmett Till Unsolved Civil Rights Crimes Reauthorization Act of 2016 to help solve cold case civil rights murders that occurred before Dec. 31, 1979. Till, an African-American teenager, was visiting his family in Money, Mississippi, during the summer of 1955 when he was abducted, beaten and killed. Two local men were prosecuted for the crime but were acquitted by an all-white jury, though they later confessed to the killing. Till's case helped galvanize the nascent civil rights movement. BJA will award an additional \$1.8 million to offer training and technical assistance to other communities seeking to resolve these cases, including making microgrants to the field.

OJP's Office for Victims of Crime has awarded \$2 million to respond to the needs of individuals and com-

munities victimized by hate crime. OVC's Services to Support Victims of Hate Crime and Strengthen Communities program funds innovative, field-generated projects that promote awareness, healing, reconciliation, service access and resource development. OVC is also providing technical assistance to state, local and tribal service providers to help identify and serve hate crime victims.

OJP's National Institute of Justice has awarded almost \$7.5 million to support research designed to develop a better understanding of the phenomenon known as domestic radicalization and to advance evidence-based strategies for preventing and intervening in acts of domestic terrorism. NIJ recently concluded projects to construct a database of individuals arrested or charged with hate crimes and to develop detailed, nationally representative data on hate crime incidents known to police.

For more information about efforts across the Department of Justice to address hate crime, visit <https://www.justice.gov/hatecrimes>. (PR)

DOC

From Page 1

quarantined right now," he said.

The source said those who remain are barely getting enough sleep.

"We're extremely tired, we're barely getting enough rest or spending time without families. However, I'm still thankful I tested negative for COVID-19. That's the bright side of this situation," he said.

Saipan Tribune has tried numerous times to reach out to Corrections Commissioner Wally Villagomez for a statement on the matter but he has yet to respond.

Currently, DOC officers who tested positive for COVID-19 are being

House pays tribute to Ogumoro for 50 yrs. of service

By **FERDIE DE LA TORRE**
ferdie_delatorre@saipantribune.com
REPORTER

The House of Representatives has presented a House resolution paying tribute and commending ex-lawmaker Felicidad Leiwalan Taman Ogumoro, who in 1978 became the first female of Carolinian heritage to be elected to the House, for more than 50 years of distinguished service to the people of the Commonwealth.

Authored by Rep. Denita Kaipat Yangetmai (D-Saipan) and co-sponsored by other House members, House Resolution 22-10 was adopted and subsequently presented to Ogumoro during a House session last week. Ogumoro's family members received the resolution on her behalf as she has underlying medical conditions.

In a recorded message played in the House's chamber, Ogumoro said she is humbled by the resolution and said that when she first returned to serve in the Legislature after a 30-year absence, her mission was two-pronged: to safeguard the right of the CNMI to govern itself and to work to improve people's quality of life.

"Collectively, we, as a people, know what's best for us. If we made mistakes along

the way, we can and we must learn from them," she said.

Ogumoro said the CNMI's people were doing it before World War II, before the Germans came, and even before the Spanish landed on the CNMI's shores.

"No one cares more for our community, our people, our *man'amko* (elderly), and our children than ourselves," she added.

Ogumoro said that as then-representative, she worked with her colleagues toward strengthening the basic infrastructure and helping to ensure that all people had access to the basics—adequate food, clothing, shelter and medical care—with a focus on addressing poverty in the community.

She asked legislators to continue to do all they can to allow the small island nation become a strong and sustainable Commonwealth, where the right to control the resources and destiny continues to remain in the hands of the people of these islands, and where an improved quality of life is enjoyed by everyone who reside here.

According to the resolution, Ogumoro "has been a committed and dedicated public servant, and has worked tirelessly to improve the lives of women and families not only

in Precinct 3 on Saipan, whom she represented so well, but also the lives of women and families all across the CNMI."

Ogumoro has served in the government of the Trust Territory of the Pacific Islands, the private sector and local government for over 50 years. In 1968, Ogumoro graduated valedictorian from Mount Carmel High School.

She attended Saint Mary's College in Leavenworth, Kansas, where she graduated with a bachelor of arts degree in Sociology in 1973. Ogumoro returned home to serve as the Training and Development specialist of the Division of Training and Development, Department of Personnel during the Trust Territory of the Pacific Islands from 1973 to 1977.

Ogumoro was a member of the United Carolinians Association (1973-1980); president of the Saipan Women's Association (1975-1976), and a member of the Saipan Municipal Scholarship Board (1976-1977).

In 1978, she was elected to the House of the first CNMI Legislature representing Precinct 5. In 1980, she was elected to serve her second term in the House.

During her tenure in the House, Ogumoro was the

author of Public Law 2-19, which established the Division of Youth Services; was a staunch supporter of Executive Order 25, which established the Northern Marianas College; and was a member of the Policy Committee for the new Commonwealth Health Center.

In 1982, she ventured into the private sector and held various program and management positions.

In 1985, she was elected delegate to the 2nd Constitutional Convention. She was the author of Constitutional Amendment 21, establishing the Office of Special Assistant for Women's Affairs; Constitutional Amendment 38, making the Northern Marianas College autonomous and guaranteeing it 1% funding; and Constitutional Amendment 38, making the Public School System autonomous and guaranteeing it 15% funding.

She was again elected representative of Precinct 3 in 2010 and became a member of the House in the 17th, 18th, and 19th legislatures. She became the first female vice speaker during her term in the 17th Legislature.

During her seven-year tenure as a House representative, Ogumoro was author of many public laws and resolutions that include, among others, Public Law 17-040, estab-

lishing Northern Marianas Decent Registry; House Bill 18-034, designed to generate revenue for the Commonwealth Healthcare Corp.; and House Legislative 18-001 amending Article 12 decreasing minimum blood quantum

requirement.

Recently completed four years serving as the program administrator for the CNMI Women's Association (2017-2021), and three years as first vice president of the NMI Republican Party.

CUC ADVISORIES

Water service interruption in Fina Sisu on Wednesday

The Commonwealth Utilities Corp. would like to inform the public that there will be a scheduled water service interruption on Wednesday, Dec. 29, 2021, from 8am to 5pm for customers in the Fina Sisu village along Tun Antonio Apa Road and Tun Joaquin Doi Road.

The scheduled water service interruption is to allow CUC's contractor for the Fina Sisu Waterline Replacement Project to perform the tapping and connection of the new 8-inch waterline at Tun Antonio Apa Road. Customers may experience low water pressure to no water. Water service to the affected areas will resume soon after the connection.

This project is part of the Fina Sisu Waterline Replacement Project to provide a more reliable water system to the people of the CNMI. It is funded by the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency. **(PR)**

Revised scheduled water service interruption for the areas of San Vicente, Dandan Homestead and Naftan

The Commonwealth Utilities Corp. would like to inform the public that there will be a scheduled water service interruption on Wednesday, Dec. 29, 2021, from 8am to 4pm for customers in the upper and south sides of San Vicente, Dandan Homestead, and Naftan areas.

The scheduled water service interruption is to allow CUC's contractor for the San Vicente Water Tank Replacement Project to connect the new water tank to the existing distribution line. Water service to the affected areas will resume soon thereafter.

This project is part of the San Vicente Water Tank Replacement Project to provide a more reliable water system to the people of the CNMI. It is funded by the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency. **(PR)**



NORTHERN MARIANAS TECHNICAL INSTITUTE

P.O. Box 504880 Saipan MP 96950
Tel. No.: (670) 323.6601
Procurement Office

REQUEST FOR PROPOSAL

RFP-NMTI/2022-001

Northern Marianas Technical Institute Workforce Career Training Facility

The Commonwealth of the Northern Marian Islands (CNMI) is soliciting proposals from qualified consulting firms to provide professional services for the design and construction management (CM) for the Northern Marianas Technical Institute Workforce Career Training Facility (NMTI) on the island of Saipan. The Facility will be located in Koblerville, Saipan as indicated on the attached Site Plan (Attachment A). This project is being funded by a grant from the US Department of Commerce, Economic Development Administration.

This solicitation is in accordance with CNMI Procurement Regulations NMIAC § 70-30.3-305. To also include provisions of CNMI Procurement Regulations, NMIAC Section §70-30.3-725 prohibiting kickbacks and gratuities, NMIAC Section §70-30.3-730 prohibition against contingent fees shall apply.

All firms submitting their RFPs may be considered as a Registered A&E firm with the CNMI pursuant to NMIAC § 70-30.3-250.

All firms must have or obtain a valid Certificate of Authorization (COA) from the Commonwealth of the Northern Marianas Board of Professional Licensing. Information in obtaining a COA may be requested from the CNMI Board of Professional Licensing.

A pre-proposal meeting will be held on December 28, 2021, at 10:00 a.m. via Zoom Video Communication. Interested firms will be provided the video teleconference link. Firms are requested to submit a notice of their intent to participate in the pre-proposal meeting one (1) day before the meeting via email at: admin@nmtechnnmi.org. Attendance is not mandatory, but is recommended.

Inquiries regarding this RFP must be submitted in writing on or before December 21, 2021, no later than 9:00 a.m. via email to Ms. Jodina Attao, CEO at: admin@nmtechnnmi.org.

Sealed proposals for this project shall be submitted with one (1) original and four (4) copies to the NMTI Procurement Officer located at the NMTI campus, Lowerbase, Saipan, MP-96950 no later than **4:00pm, local time, Chamorro Standard Time, 01/18/2022 and must be marked "Proposal - Northern Marianas Technical Institute Workforce Career Training Facility NMTI-2022/RFP-001."** Questions regarding this solicitation should be directed to Ms. Jodina Attao, by email only at admin@nmtechnnmi.org. Electronic submissions may be accepted if approved prior to the submission deadline.

Proposals located outside of the Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands may obtain an additional seven (7) working days for receipt of their proposal by submitting a Notice of Intent to propose. Notice of Intent to Propose must be received by the **NMTI Procurement Office no later than 4:00pm local time, 01/25/2022, via email to amy.babauta@nmtechnnmi.org.**

For proposers located outside of the Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands an original and three (3) copies of sealed proposal must be postmarked by the US Postal Services of the official government postal service of foreign country **no later than 01/25/2022, and mailed to NMTI Procurement Officer at PO Box 504880 Saipan, MP 96950 and the proposal must be received no later than 02/04/2022.** Electronic submissions may be accepted if approved prior to the submission deadline.

The Project Description and Scope of Work is available beginning December 14, 2021 at the NMTI Procurement Office, located at the NMTI Main Office, Lower Base. Request may be sent via email to Ms. Amy Lynn Babauta at amy.babauta@nmtechnnmi.org.

/s/ Jodina C. Attao
CEO

/s/ Amy Lynn Babauta
Procurement Officer

PUBLIC NOTICE

U.S. Environmental Protection Agency Notice of Opportunity to Request Public Hearing on EPA's Approval of CNMI's Program Revision

The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) is announcing its approval of revision to the Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands' (CNMI's) approved primacy program, the EPA-approved program that oversees public water systems in CNMI. CNMI has adopted regulations related to the federal Ground Water Rule, and EPA has determined that these regulations are no less stringent than the corresponding federal regulations.

Any interested person may request a public hearing on EPA's determination. The deadline for submitting a request for a public hearing shall be no sooner than 30 days after the publication of this notice and is definitively established in the Federal Register Notice related to this action. The request must be addressed to the Regional Administrator (RA) of EPA Region 9, via the following email address: R9dw-program@epa.gov. Please note "State Program Revision Determination" in the subject line of the email. The RA may deny frivolous or insubstantial requests for a hearing. If EPA Region 9 does not receive a timely request for a hearing or a request for a hearing was denied by the RA for being frivolous or insubstantial, and the RA does not elect to hold a hearing on their own motion, EPA's approval shall become final and effective 30 days after publication of the previously mentioned Federal Register Notice related to this action, and no further public notice will be issued. A request for a public hearing shall include the following: (1) the name, address, and telephone number of the individual, organization, or other entity requesting a hearing; (2) a brief statement of the requesting person's interest in this determination and of information that the requesting person intends to submit at such a hearing; and (3) the signature of the individual making the request; or, if the request is made on behalf of an organization or other entity, the signature of a responsible official of the organization or other entity.

Documents relating to this determination that were submitted by CNMI as part of its program revision request are available online at <http://deq.gov.mp/sec.asp?seclD=5>. In addition, these documents are available between the hours of 7:30 a.m. and 4:30 p.m., Monday through Friday, at the following address:

CNMI Bureau of Environmental and Coastal Quality, Gualo Rai Center - Safe Drinking Water Branch 2nd floor, Chalan Pale Arnold - Middle Road, Saipan, MP 96950.

If there are issues accessing the website, contact Travis Spaeth, CNMI BECQ, at (670) 664-8500, or via email at travis.spaeth@becq.gov.mp.

For further information, contact Anna Yen, EPA Region 9, at (415) 972-3976, or via email at yen.anna@epa.gov.

Ex-USCG commanding officer honored with Seven Seals Award

TAMUNING, Guam—The Guam-CNMI Employer Support of the Guard and Reserve, a Department of Defense program, has honored Capt. Christopher M. Chase, former commanding officer of the U.S. Coast Guard Sector Guam, with the ESGR Seven Seals Award in recognition of his meritorious leadership and initiative in support of the men and women who serve in the National Guard and Reserve, and for his outstanding support to the Guam-CNMI committee.

The Seven Seals Award is presented in recognition of a significant individual or organizational achievement and initiative that promotes and supports the men and women who serve in the National Guard and Reserve, and supports the ESGR mission.

"Captain Chase has achieved the honor of a Seven Seals Award, by demonstrating an



From left, 1LT Jemilyn Sakisat, ESGR military coordinator; MG Benny Paulino, ESGR vice chair; David Sablan, ESGR ombudsman director; Capt. Christopher M. Chase, former commanding officer, U.S. Coast Guard Sector Guam; Rey Llaneta, ESGR state chair; Dina San Nicolas, ESGR training director; Don Clark, ESGR EO director and ombudsman; Norma Castillon, ESGR awards coordinator; and Angel Vilar, ESGR VST.

CONTRIBUTED PHOTO

outstanding amount of support to the Guam-CNMI ESGR State Committee, by valuing the military service of all Guard and Reserve employees on Guam and in the CNMI, and by supporting the readiness and retention of our all-volunteer force, for our national defense," said Rey Llaneta, Guam-CNMI ESGR state chair.

ESGR is a Department of Defense program that develops and promotes supportive work environments for service members in the National Guard and Reserve through outreach, recognition, and educational opportunities that increase awareness of applicable laws. ESGR also provides assistance in resolving conflicts between service members and their employer.

For more information about ESGR outreach programs, call 671-344-1282/3 or 1-800-336-4590 or visit www.ESGR.mil/GU. (PR)

Dec. 29 is last day to register for GCC spring semester

MANGILAO, Guam—Anyone interested in attending Guam Community College in spring 2022 is encouraged to register soon. Registration may be done in person at the Mangilao campus or on the GCC website at www.guamcc.edu/apply. Information on the GCC admissions process, the academic calendar, tuition rates and fees, placement tests can also be found on the college website. Last day to register is this Wednesday, Dec. 29, 2021, with the first day of class on Wednesday, Jan. 5, 2022.

Completing and submitting a FAFSA application opens students to the opportunity of receiving federal financial aid, scholarships and grant funding to support your education at GCC. The workshop and the FAFSA application process are free of charge. For more information or assistance with financial aid applications/scholarships available call (671) 735-5543/5544 or email financialaid@guamcc.edu.

Additionally, those whose financial situation has changed from what is reflected in their most recent income tax return are encouraged to adjust their FAFSA application. Some applicants may now be eligible for financial aid based on those changes. This applies to those who lost a job or otherwise experienced a drop in income.

For more information on FAFSA financial aid and scholarships visit our website at www.GuamCC.edu/FinancialAid. To enroll, or register, in the spring 2022 semester call (671) 735-5531 or email gcc.registrar@guamcc.edu. (GCC)



Second- and first-place winners of a group dance competition team Zumbabelles and team Zumbalicious take a group photo together onstage during M2 Fitness' year-end Christmas party at Saipan World Resort's Royal Taga Ballroom.

JOSHUA SANTOS

By JOSHUA SANTOS
joshua_santos@saipantribune.com
REPORTER

Health and fitness nonprofit organization M2 Fitness held its yearend Christmas party on Dec. 19 at the Saipan World Resort's Royal Taga Ballroom. The dinner event featured multiple dance performances, a group dance contest, and movie-themed costume contest.

The costume contest was dubbed the "Mr. and Mrs. Star of the Night 2021," with a men's and women's category. There was one male entrant, Benito Rectitud, who won by default dressed as a Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtle.

The women's category had several entrants, and there was a tie among two entrants to make it into the top five. In no particular order, the winners were Des Calayo dressed as Captain Marvel; Paz Echavez dressed in a *Great Gatsby*-inspired costume; Vanessa Lorejo dressed as Professor X from the X-Men franchise; Filamer Reyes as Scarlet Witch; and there a

M2 Fitness holds yearend Christmas party



From left: "Mrs. Star of the Night 2021" winners Vanessa Lorejo dressed as Professor X from the X-Men franchise; Faye La Torre as Poison Ivy from DC Comics; Des Calayo as Captain Marvel; Filamer Reyes as Scarlet Witch from Marvel Comics; Paz Echavez in a *Great Gatsby*-inspired costume; and Emily Cabrera dressed as Princess Elsa from Disney's *Frozen* share a photo onstage during M2 Fitness' yearend Christmas party at Saipan World Resort's Royal Taga Ballroom.

JOSHUA SANTOS

two-way tie between Faye La Torre dressed as Poison Ivy and Emily Cabrera dressed as Princess Elsa.

Winning the group dance competition and taking home

\$500 and a \$50 gift card to Surf Club Restaurant was team Zumbalicious. Taking home second place and \$300 was team Zumbabelles, and taking third and \$200 was

team M2 Groovers.

M2 Fitness president Mary Grace Bautista later expressed thanks to M2 Fitness members, the organization's core committees, and all who

have supported M2 Fitness' events and programs.

"As the president of M2 Fitness, I couldn't feel any prouder when I look back at what our group has achieved and consider the team as [some of my best friends]. ...I witnessed the hard work, sincerity and truthfulness of [the] people who stayed with us through our highs and lows," said Bautista in an email. "I am truly grateful to have such amazing people on a daily basis to work with and exercise together. ...The people behind M2 are one the reasons why we kept going and made M2 stronger than ever. From M2 Fitness: Shape it up! Get fit! Don't quit! Say strong!"

The events during Sunday's dinner were judged and scored by Zumba instructor Shellan Sarmiento, United Airlines' Saipan general manager Dave Baker, Saipan Mayor's Office field operations director Joann Aquino, and Islander Rent A Car CNMI sales and marketing manager Simon Odoca.

Operation Christmas Drop



A U.S. Air Force airman signs one of the bundles during Operation Christmas Drop hosted by Andersen Air Force Base, Guam, Dec. 8, 2021.
U.S. AIR FORCE/AIRMAN BREANNA GOSSETT



U.S. Air Force airmen sign one of the bundles during Operation Christmas Drop hosted by Andersen Air Force Base in Guam last Dec. 8, 2021. Christmas Drop is an annual operation that gives supplies to more than 55 small islands in the Pacific during the holiday season.
U.S. AIR FORCE/AIRMAN BREANNA GOSSETT



U.S. Air Force airmen wave to island locals after dropping bundles of supplies during Operation Christmas Drop hosted by Andersen Air Force Base, Guam, Dec. 8, 2021.
U.S. AIR FORCE/AIRMAN BREANNA GOSSETT



A U.S. Air Force airman sits on the ramp of a C-130J Super Hercules after dropping bundles of supplies during Operation Christmas Drop hosted by Andersen Air Force Base, Guam, Dec. 8, 2021.
U.S. AIR FORCE/AIRMAN BREANNA GOSSETT

U.S. Air Force airmen sign one of the bundles during Operation Christmas Drop hosted by Andersen Air Force Base, Guam, Dec. 8, 2021.
U.S. AIR FORCE/AIRMAN BREANNA GOSSETT



U.S. Air Force airmen sit on the ramp of a C-130J Super Hercules after dropping bundles of supplies during Operation Christmas Drop hosted by Andersen Air Force Base, Guam, Dec. 8, 2021.
U.S. AIR FORCE/AIRMAN BREANNA GOSSETT



U.S. Air Force airmen sit on the ramp of a C-130J Super Hercules after dropping bundles of supplies during Operation Christmas Drop hosted by Andersen Air Force Base, Guam, Dec. 8, 2021.
U.S. AIR FORCE/AIRMAN BREANNA GOSSETT



Senior airman Kimberly Doyle, assigned to the 36th Airlift Squadron, helps an airman set up his harness before take-off during Operation Christmas Drop hosted by Andersen Air Force Base, Guam, Dec. 8, 2021.
U.S. AIR FORCE/AIRMAN BREANNA GOSSETT



A U.S. Air Force airman signs one of the bundles during Operation Christmas Drop hosted by Andersen Air Force Base, Guam, Dec. 8, 2021.
U.S. AIR FORCE/AIRMAN BREANNA GOSSETT



U.S. Air Force airmen prepare their harnesses before taking off in a C-130J Super Hercules during Operation Christmas Drop hosted by Andersen Air Force Base, Guam, Dec. 8, 2021.
U.S. AIR FORCE/AIRMAN BREANNA GOSSETT

Opinion

Hafa Adai!

Saipan Tribune

THE CNMI'S FIRST DAILY NEWSPAPER

Volume XXXI, Issue No. 257

Published daily at 2/F JP Center,

Beach Road, Garapan, Saipan, CNMI

Mailing Address: PMB 34, Box 10001, Saipan, MP, 96950

Jayvee L. Vallejera EDITOR
editor@saipantribune.com

Mark Rabago ASSOCIATE EDITOR
mark_rabago@saipantribune.com

MEMBER

AP The Associated Press

Pacific Islands News Association

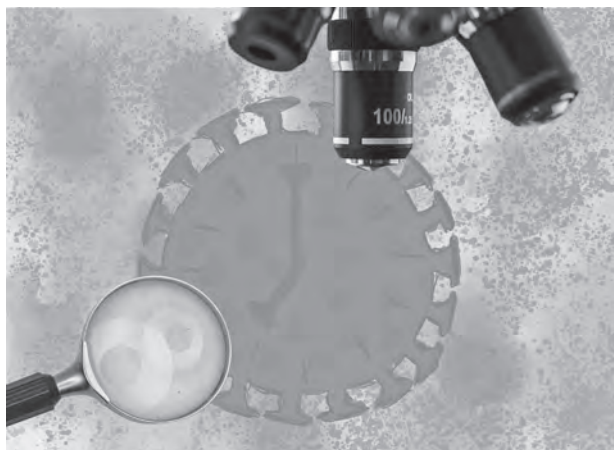
EDITORIAL

President vs. pandemic: Biden's omicron plan is sound

When the TV broadcast networks (yes, Virginia, they still exist) break into their afternoon soap operas (and yes, dear, those also still exist) with a White House address from the president to the nation, it's supposed to be important stuff worth paying attention to.

President Joe Biden's message yesterday was both important and worth paying attention to: COVID, omicron edition, is seemingly everywhere, but we have the tools, high tech and low tech, to beat it. The Big Science vaccines, for which Biden correctly credited President Trump's administration, are the way to victory. And simple masks will hinder spread when worn indoors.

A vital tool of containment, COVID tests, are coming to your neighborhood and to your mailbox with a half-billion at-home rapid tests being readied for the Post Office for free delivery to anyone who wants them. There will be new federal testing sites set up in areas of high need. The first on that list is right here in the five boroughs, said Biden, where demand is far outstripping supply, as we note with disapproval in another editorial today.



At overloaded hospitals with COVID patients and their stretched-beyond-exhaustion staff, Uncle Sam will be deploying hundreds of ambulances and EMS crews to transport patients to hospitals with open beds, a national version of what we did here last year.

Omicron may turn out to be mild—early indicators are promising—but in this real-world science experiment, we can't risk lives without definitive data. As the president warned, the minority of Americans who haven't been vaccinated are in jeopardy as COVID deaths, now 800,000 nationally, are almost entirely among the unvaxxed. Please reconsider, he asked. For the majority of Americans who have been vaccinated, the president urged booster shots, like he and Trump got. On boosters, Mayor de Blasio, who has been very good on COVID, has yet another smart idea of \$100 bounties for boosters. If Florida Man Trump were still a New Yorker, we would have been happy to give him the 100 bucks ourselves.

©2021 New York Daily News



Worst-case scenarios—unmasked, unresolved

Outside, millions of desperate people have been standing for hours in lines stretching around the corners of America's city streets and suburban strip malls. Inside, others have been searching the internet—and getting kicked off by overloaded websites and ticked-off by under-informing ones.

They were just trying to do the right thing: Get tested for COVID so they could find out if it was safe to go home for Christmas. Safe for them and mainly safe for their loved ones, as the new, highly contagious omicron variant was sweeping through America and a world already reeling from the deadly delta variant.

Yet there were no simple, cheap or free tests that millions could get in time to find a way to be sure they could have the most merry Christmas possible. But President Joe Biden just assured them that he'd get them the tests—just not until January, at best.

That's how things have turned out as America nears the end of the first year of Joe Biden's so far up-and-down presidency. We have seen impressive successes, yet also shattering setbacks. But here's the good news: Our president and his team can discover their central problem—and how to fix it—just by glancing at their own rearview mirror.

Look Back: 2021 turned out to be a Year of Worst-Case Scenarios. Time and again, Biden and especially his best and brightest advisers on domestic security and national security failed to anticipate the fact that a worst-case scenario could happen. So they were caught flatfooted when the worst happened—here in America and also half a world away in Afghanistan.

To sense the mindset that led to today's worst-case crisis, check out this White House Dec. 6 news briefing.

Press secretary Jen Psaki, one of the best briefers I've seen in decades of covering presidencies, was asked a good, fair question many Americans would ask about COVID testing: "Last week ... the president explained some ramp-up in testing. But there are still a lot of countries, like Germany and the U.K. and South Korea, that basically have massive testing, free of charge or for a nominal fee. Why can't that be done in the United States?"

Psaki made the mistake press secretaries often make when they assume their first priority is defending their boss, rather than briefing the people. They turn their briefing into a debate.

"Should we just send one to every American?" the pressed secretary asked back at the questioner. "... Then what—then what happens if you—if every American has one test? How much does that cost, and then what happens after that?"

But the self-detrimental defensiveness begins at the top. Lis-

By **MARTIN SCHRAM**

Tribune News Service

Martin Schram, an op-ed columnist for Tribune News Service, is a veteran Washington journalist, author and TV documentary executive. Readers may send him email at martin.schram@gmail.com.



ten to how Biden responded to PBS' Yamiche Alcindor on Dec. 21, when she fairly asked what millions of Americans wanted to know: "What's your message to Americans who are trying to get tested now and who are not able to get tested and who are wondering what took so long to ramp up testing?"

"Come on, 'What took so long?'" Biden replied, testily repeating her question. "Well, what took so long is it didn't take long at all. What happened was the omicron virus spread even more rapidly than anybody thought. If I had told you four weeks ago that this would spread by—a day-to-day basis—it would spread by 50, 100%, 200%, 500%, you would've looked at me and said, 'Biden, what are you drinking?' But that's what it did."

Yet another president found a way to paint himself into a corner of his Oval Office. The Joe Biden I've known for decades would have been the first to say her question was fair—and he would have answered it with a Biden "straight-from-the-shoulder" reply. He would have said he sure wishes he'd asked the worst-case scenario question: Will a future COVID variant cause every American to want an at-home quick test? And he'd have answered his own question: Let's order and stockpile them now—and if they're ever needed, we can immediately give them out for free!

Earlier this year, we saw what happened when Defense Secretary Lloyd Austin never asked the ultimate worst-case scenario question: If Afghanistan's military collapses after we rushed the U.S. troop withdrawal, how will Americans and our Afghan allies get from Kabul to the airport so they could be airlifted to freedom? Sadly, we all saw that deadly answer on live TV.

And this past week, as omicron virus spread like a wildfire, we saw what happened because Biden and his top COVID advisers failed to ask—and answer—that worst-case question about stockpiling COVID quick tests months ago. They could have been giving away free quick tests this week so you and your loved ones could have stress-free holidays.

Team Biden can and must do better in 2022.

EDITORIAL POLICY

Letters to the editor must include the NAME, VILLAGE ADDRESS, and CONTACT NUMBER of the contributor. Letters that do not have these information will immediately be trashed. Contributions consisting of 500 words or less have more chances of getting published. The *Saipan Tribune* reserves the right to publish a contribution or not; the right to edit submissions for length, accuracy, and clarity; and the right to publish and distribute contributions in print, electronic, or other media formats. Submissions may be sent via snail mail to the 2nd Floor, JP Center, Beach Road, Garapan, Saipan, 96950; fax (670) 235-3740; e-mail to editor@saipantribune.com; or through our website at www.saipantribune.com.

Inflation's here. Let's not make it worse

For a quite a while, progressives were calling our country's painful inflation mild and "transitory," meaning it would last just a yawn or two and be gone. Relax, enjoy yourself, put up with policies that just maybe strike you as insane and vote for congressional Democrats, we were told. Just one problem: Escalating price increases have persisted and could hang on for a long time, thanks in no small part to governmental curses dressed up as benevolence.

You've noticed all of this, I suspect. You go to the grocery store and the cost of food encourages the kind of diet no doctor would recommend. Visit a gas station and maybe you'll decide to buy a bicycle that, sorry, could cost as much as \$7,000. Rent is going up, buying a house could put your financial future six feet under and who knows what tents are selling for? Among so much else on the excessive cost list are Christmas trees.

In contemplating how seriously this inflation is already trashing our standard of living, consider these facts: Price increases were up 6.8 percent in November, the highest year-long increase seen in almost 40 years. Even some optimists see it lasting into late 2022 and some think a recession could ensue.

Well, it's said, that's COVID for you, and, yes, the pandemic disrupted supply chains worldwide, making it difficult to distribute products needed to maintain all kinds of businesses and retail operations in the usual way. When you have less and less to sell, you sell at higher and higher prices for survival's sake.

But will people pay these prices sufficiently to sustain profits? Well, yes, if government has surrounded us with money enough to enable the transactions.

One way the government promotes this end is for the Federal Reserve to provide loans to banks and other institutions at interest rates so low as to enable all kinds of cheap borrowing and spending and demand. The Federal Reserve, which dismissed inflation as much as Democrats when the curtain began rising, now looks as if it might back away if far too slowly, but not President Joe Biden and fellow Democrats in Congress.

Even as we have millions of people not looking for work as another way of erasing supply, they see the answer to every economic woe you have ever heard of as spend, spend, spend. And yes, there was bipartisan congressional spending—\$4 trillion worth—in 2020 to deal with pandemic-generated needs. We had to pay for such needs as vaccines, other health care and business loans even as there were fumbles aplenty.

The economy was recuperating, but next came something particularly scary, however, namely Biden's 2021 \$1.9 trillion America Rescue Plan, about as big an emergency bill the nation has ever seen, providing welfare relief of all kinds, throwing thousands of dollars at people who weren't poor, addressing some essentials, yes, but overall an economic threat. High taxes on corporations are paid by less supply, still higher prices, fewer jobs and lower wages.

By JAY AMBROSE

Tribune News Service

Jay Ambrose is an op-ed columnist for Tribune News Service. Readers may email him at speaktojay@aol.com.



Next in line was a bipartisan \$1.2 trillion infrastructure bill that again had good points along with bad ones, and now there is the issue of the Build Back Better fraud. Meant to fulfill an accumulation of progressive wishes over the next 10 years in one miswrought package, the House-passed legislative plan is to transform America into a semi-socialist state and questionably address the climate change challenge. The wisdom of incrementalism is dismissed for the sake of opportunism and honesty is bypassed by the supposed \$2 trillion cost almost certainly working its way into \$5 trillion intentions.

Proponents say the bill will do oh, so much good, but if the goal of extending programs costing extra \$3 trillion is not accomplished, much of the good will be short-lived. Meanwhile, inflation is already wiping out wage increases and will worsen poverty. What's happening right now could cost the average family \$3,500 a year. How about some real compassion?

The high-water mark of Biden-era progressivism

Joe Manchin and London Breed have nothing in common. One is an old-school Democratic senator from West Virginia, surviving and thriving in an increasingly red state; the other is the progressive mayor of San Francisco, a city that is a byword for cutting-edge left-wing politics.

Yet both, in their own ways signaled that Biden-era progressivism has reached its high-water mark. Manchin, of course, delivered an emphatic thumbs down to Joe Biden's signature Build Back Better plan, while Breed reversed field on crime in a stunningly frank endorsement of law-and-order in a jurisdiction infamous for the opposite.

The de facto pincer movement by the wildly different Democrats from wildly different parts of the country—San Francisco is roughly 19 times as large as the biggest city in West Virginia—shows that the progressive tide that built in the Trump years is finally colliding with political reality and the real-world consequences of progressive extravagance.

This doesn't mean that progressivism is spent obviously. It dominates the media, academia and almost all the rest of elite culture. At the same time, Democrats still control the elected branches of government in Washington. But a growing backlash against progressive excess has found expression in two notable acts of Democratic defiance.

By now, the context of Manchin's "no" on Build Back Better is familiar. Joe Biden campaigned as a pragmatic Democrat only to reverse field after his election and develop a heroic image of

himself as the next transformational Democratic president in the line of FDR and LBJ.

This drove the mistake of not realizing that Manchin or any other Democratic dissenter in the 50-50 Senate had the power to derail Build Back Better and accordingly scaling it back from the outset. Instead, the White House and congressional leadership acted as if Manchin could be cajoled or bullied out of his oft-repeated qualms.

Perhaps Democrats will reunite with the senator on a scaled-back spending bill in the new year, but the era of FDR fantasies is definitely over. Democrats should ask themselves, if they had a mandate to remake the country, why the entire project depended on the approval of a single conservative Democrat from West Virginia?

Now, Democrats are looking down the barrel of a mid-term election wipe-out that could give the GOP a durable House majority that will put paid to any thought of BBB-style legislation for years.

If Manchin said "enough" to big-spending federal aggrandizement, London Breed said it to the soft-on-crime consensus in blue cities that has led to spiraling disorder. The Bay Area, home to the smash-and-grab robbery and other routine offenses against basic human decency, has been Exhibit A.

Concluding that even the tolerant people of perhaps the country's most tolerant city wouldn't put up with it much longer, Breed had her Howard Beale moment. In a speech clearly meant

By RICH LOWRY

(c) 2021 by King Features Synd., Inc.

Rich Lowry is editor of the National Review.



to set down a political and rhetorical marker, she called for an end to "the reign of criminals who are destroying our city."

The Breed turnabout, from police-defunder a year ago to would-be Rudy Giuliani now, marks an end to the period after George Floyd's death when anti-police sentiment was ascendant.

There are other signs that the progressive momentum is beginning to give way. A rightward shift among Latinos shows the limits of paint-by-the-numbers identity politics. That the left's response to the grassroots movement against critical race theory in schools has been to deny there is any critical race theory in schools speaks to a telling defensiveness. Next year, the Supreme Court may well knock out Roe and Casey, cornerstones of the progressive social agenda.

Of course, the political and cultural war will continue apace. Still, December 2021 looks like an inflection point when, as Breed put it in her speech, "the bull***t" finally got a reality check.

The right to refuse dangerous work

The massive tornadoes that struck in mid-December claimed the lives of more than a dozen workers at an Amazon warehouse in Illinois and the Mayfield candle factory in Kentucky. Some of the surviving workers said their requests to leave were met with threats of termination.

None of this should have happened. In fact, it's against the law.

Section 5 of the Occupational Safety & Health Act of 1970, which was signed by Republican President Richard Nixon, created what the Occupational Safety and Health Administration calls the "Workers' Right to Refuse Dangerous Work." The Act covers most private sector and some public sector workers.

According to OSHA's website, the right of workers to refuse to perform a task is protected if all of the following four conditions are met:

- The worker, where possible, has asked the employer to correct the hazard, but the employer failed to do so.
- The employee has refused to work in "good faith," due to

genuine concern of imminent danger.

- A reasonable person would agree that the conditions present a real danger.
- There isn't enough time to get the hazard corrected through regular enforcement channels.

Given the imminent and dangerous threat the tornadoes posed, it was both legal and logical for workers at Amazon and Mayfield to leave. What OSHA or the Department of Labor or the Justice Department do about that remains to be seen.

If only workers had used their rights! But how would they know, unless they knew the law or where to look to find it or even what they'd be looking for?

A standard OSHA poster for display in the workplace is silent on the right to refuse, referring in general terms to workers' rights to a safe workplace and offering a phone number to call. OSHA must make those rights clear on mandatory workplace posters.

The media have also largely failed to draw appropriate atten-

By KATHY WILKES

Progressive Perspectives






Kathy Wilkes of Madison, Wisconsin, is a longtime labor journalist and former union co-founder and officer. This column was produced for The Progressive magazine and distributed by Tribune News Service.

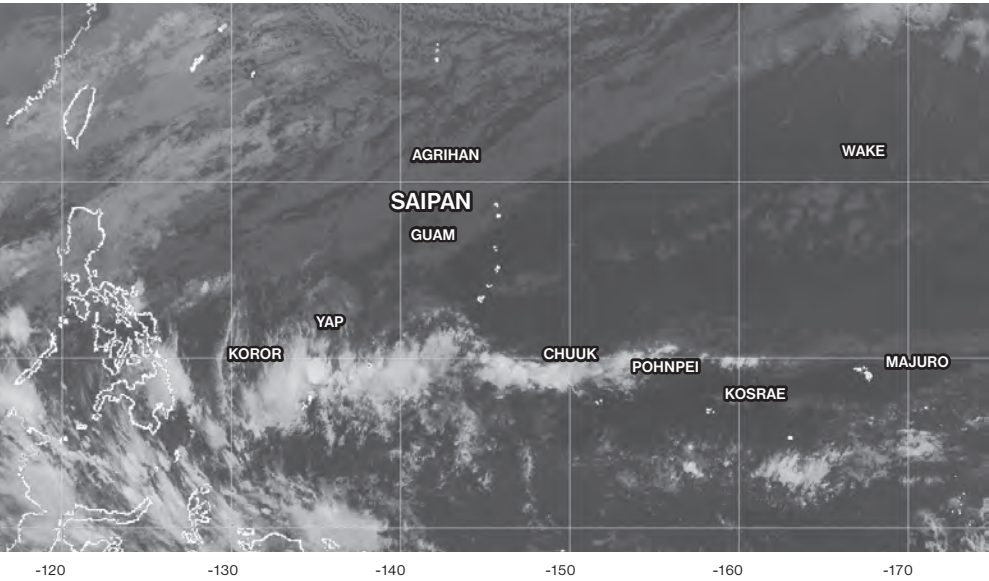


tion to these workplace rights, as experienced reporters dedicated to labor issues have by-and-large been replaced by general assignment reporters or those covering business.

It's no surprise, then, that workers don't know their rights or, at minimum, how to save their own lives on the job in the face of workplace dangers. U.S. workers deserve better. Who would dare say publicly they don't?

The Weather

5-DAY FORECAST FOR SAIPAN AND TINIAN									
TODAY		WEDNESDAY		THURSDAY		FRIDAY		SATURDAY	
									
Breezy. Partly cloudy with isolated showers.		Breezy. Partly cloudy with isolated showers.		Breezy. Partly cloudy with isolated showers.		Breezy. Partly cloudy with isolated showers.		Breezy. Partly cloudy with isolated showers.	
86°	75°	87°	76°	85°	75°	85°	75°	85°	75°
YESTERDAY'S SATELLITE IMAGE									



PICTURE TIME: 6:35 AM, MONDAY, DECEMBER 27, 2021

Western North Pacific between equator and 25N from 130E to 180.

Skies have become mostly cloudy early this morning, as a weak surface trough crosses the region. This can be seen on satellite imagery, and confirmed by visual checks outside. The imagery also shows less clouds to our northeast, heading this way, with a clearing trend expected after sunrise. Winds will increase today, only to increase more over the next few days, which will increase the fire danger.

Satellite image and accompanying information are provided by the National Weather Service. For an updated weather forecast, visit the National Weather Service Guam homepage: www.prh.noaa.gov/guam/

STOP THE SPREAD

The Governor's COVID-19 Task Force and Commonwealth Healthcare Corp. continue to encourage residents within the Marianas to practice social distancing, which means avoiding close contact with people in order to avoid catching the virus yourself and to avoid passing it on to others.

- Stay home as much as possible. Avoid unnecessary travel or public places.
- Avoid social gatherings in groups of more than 10.
- Choose drive-thru, take-out, or delivery options, or outdoor seating, if available, when dining in.
- Send only one healthy adult from the household run necessary errands, such as getting groceries or picking up medications. Leave children, elderly, and other vulnerable people at home as much as possible. When returning home from an errand, wash your hands before doing anything else.
- Older adults and people with chronic medical conditions are at higher risk of getting very sick from this illness. People at high risk should stay at home as much as possible.
- Create a household plan of action, <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/prepare/checklisthousehold-ready.html>
- Ensure a 30-day supply of all medicines.

Continue good hand hygiene

- Wash your hands for at least 20 seconds with soap and water, avoid touching your face, cover coughs and sneezes with a tissue or your sleeve.
- Use an alcohol-based hand sanitizer if soap and water are not readily available.

Know the signs and symptoms of COVID-19 and what to do if you become symptomatic

- Stay home when you are sick and if you recently traveled to a place with COVID-19. Self-quarantine means:
 - Choosing a room in your house that can be used to separate sick household members from others.
 - Washing your hands often with soap and water for at least 20 seconds.

onds. If soap and water are not available, use an alcohol-based hand sanitizer.

- Avoiding touching your eyes, nose, and mouth with unwashed hands.
- Limiting visitors

CHCC appreciates the patience and understanding of the community at this time. To obtain general information about the CNMI COVID-19 response, contact the Governor's COVID-19 Task Force Hotline at 287-0046, 287-0489, 287-1089. These numbers are available Monday to Sunday, 7:30am - 4:30pm.

For medical information about COVID-19, reach out to the COVID-19 Infoline at the following numbers: 285-1672/1352. These numbers are available Monday to Friday, 7:30am - 4:30pm.

For mental health support and helpful tips during a crisis, call the Mental Health Support Line at 285-1856, 323-6560, 323-6561 These numbers are available Monday to Friday, 7:30am - 4:30 pm. For the 24/7 Disaster Distress Helpline, call SAMSHA at 1-800-985-5990.

For more information about DIY face coverings, visit <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/prevent-getting-sick/cloth-face-cover.html>

For more information about CHCC programs, follow CHCC on Facebook, Instagram, Twitter at @cnmichcc, check out our website at www.chcc.gov.mp or call us at (670) 234-8950.

For more information on the Governor's COVID-19 Task Force, visit www.governor.gov.mp and, follow @GovernorCNMI on Facebook, Instagram, and Twitter.

This health advisory may be found online at <http://www.chcc.gov.mp/pressrelease.html> and at www.governor.gov.mp/covid-19.

Rumor control

During crises like this, oftentimes the spread of misinformation is just as dangerous as the virus itself. The CNMI is reminded to only share official and verified notices, press releases, and advisories from the Governor's COVID-19 Task Force and CHCC.

Source: Office of the Governor

NEWS DESK For news tips, corrections and requests for news coverage, call (670) 235-NEWS (6397), 235-2440, fax 235.3740. E-mail: editor@saipantribune.com. Website:www.saipantribune.com.

CUSTOMER SERVICE For inquiries, purchase of back issues and complaints, call (670) 235-8747, 235-2440, fax 235-3740.

SUBSCRIPTION Published Monday to Friday, Saipan Tribune offers door-to-door on-island delivery at an annual rate of \$180. For additional subscription information, call (670) 235-8747 or 235-2769, or fax 235-3740.

ADVERTISING For inquiries contact (670) 235-2769. E-mail: sales@saipantribune.com

MICRONESIA			▲ ▼ °F
Guam and Rota	Thunderstorms	85° / 79°	
Palau	Thunderstorms	85° / 77°	
Yap	Partly Cloudy	85° / 78°	
Chuuk	Thunderstorms	86° / 80°	
Pohnpei	Partly Cloudy	86° / 78°	
Kosrae	Thunderstorms	86° / 78°	
Majuro	Partly Cloudy	85° / 81°	

DAY	SUNRISE	SUNSET
Today	6:41 AM	5:55 PM
Wednesday	6:41 AM	5:56 PM
Thursday	6:42 AM	5:56 PM
Friday	6:41 AM	5:57 PM
Saturday	6:42 AM	5:57 PM

DAY	MOONRISE	MOONSET	MOONRISE
Today	12:45 AM	1:01 PM	-
Wednesday	1:40 AM	1:42 PM	-
Thursday	2:37 AM	2:28 PM	-
Friday	3:39 AM	3:19 PM	-
Saturday	4:45 AM	4:17 PM	-

AROUND THE GLOBE			▲ ▼ °F
Auckland	Partly Cloudy	75° / 64°	
Beijing	Sunny	43° / 25°	
Hong Kong	Partly Cloudy	72° / 63°	
Honolulu	Partly Cloudy	78° / 68°	
London	Mostly Cloudy	52° / 46°	
Los Angeles	Mostly Sunny	65° / 45°	
Manila	Partly Cloudy	84° / 77°	
Melbourne	Partly Cloudy	84° / 63°	
Miami	Partly Cloudy	80° / 71°	
New York	Cloudy	47° / 45°	
Osaka	Sunny	54° / 41°	
Paris	Cloudy	50° / 45°	
Busan	Partly Cloudy	52° / 43°	
Rome	Mostly Sunny	57° / 46°	
Salem	Showers	67° / 60°	
San Francisco	Partly Cloudy	53° / 42°	
Seoul	Cloudy	45° / 34°	
Tokyo	Mostly Sunny	54° / 37°	
Washington, DC	Mostly Cloudy	54° / 48°	

TIDES: SAIPAN HARBOR TODAY			FEET
1:46 AM	Low Tide	1.16	
7:54 AM	High Tide	0.38	
2:38 PM	Low Tide	1.76	
9:43 PM	High Tide	0.32	

FLIGHT SCHEDULE AS OF NOVEMBER 12, 2021

DEPARTURES				ARRIVALS			
SAIPAN-GUAM (GUM)				GUAM (GUM)-SAIPAN			
UA117	7:20am	8:05am	2, 4, 6	UA116	5:30am	6:16am	2, 4, 6
UA117	9:50am	10:35am	1, 3, 5, 7	UA174	8:00am	8:46am	1, 3, 5, 7
GUAM-MANILA (MNL)				MANILA (MNL)-GUAM			
UA183	8:00pm	9:50pm	Daily	UA184	10:40pm	4:30am+1	2, 5
UA184	10:55pm	4:45am+1	1, 3, 4, 6, 7				
SAIPAN-MANILA (MNL)				MANILA (MNL)-SAIPAN			
UA117/183	7:20am	9:50pm	2, 4, 6 via Guam	UA184/174	10:40pm	6:16am+1	5 via Guam
UA117/183	9:50am	9:50pm	1, 3, 5, 7 via Guam	UA184/174	10:40pm	8:46am+1	2 via Guam
UA184/174	10:55pm	6:16am+1	1, 3 via Guam	UA184/174	10:55pm	6:16am+1	4, 6, 7 via Guam
UA184/174	10:55pm	8:46am+1					
SAIPAN-INCHEON (ICN)				INCHEON (ICN)-SAIPAN			
7C3406	3:10PM	6:55PM	6	7C3405	8:30AM	2:10PM	6
TW9308	3:20PM	8:00PM	4, 5	OZ6233	9:00AM	2:30PM	6
OZ6243	4:00PM	7:40PM	6	TW9307	10:00AM	2:20PM	4, 5

LEGEND: Days: Monday (1), Tuesday (2), Wednesday (3), Thursday (4), Friday (5), Saturday (6) and Sunday (7); UA United Airlines • ETD: Estimated Time of Departure; ETA: Estimated Time of Arrival. *(The Saipan Tribune is not responsible for any changes in the schedule.)*

STAR MARIANAS AIR, INC.

FLIGHT SCHEDULE AS OF MAY 18, 2021

SAIPAN TO ROTA				ROTA TO SAIPAN			
FLIGHT #	DEPARTURE	ARRIVAL	FREQUENCY	FLIGHT #	DEPARTURE	ARRIVAL	FREQUENCY
1301	8:30AM	9:00AM	Daily	3101	9:30AM	10:00AM	Daily
1302	11:00AM	11:30AM	Daily	3102	12:00AM	12:30AM	Daily
1303	1:30PM	2:00PM	Tues/Wed/Thurs/Fri Daily	3103	1:30PM	3:00PM	Tues/Wed/Thurs/Fri Daily
1304	3:30PM	4:00PM		3104	4:30PM	5:00PM	
ROTA TO GUAM				GUAM TO ROTA			
FLIGHT #	DEPARTURE	ARRIVAL	FREQUENCY	FLIGHT #	DEPARTURE	ARRIVAL	FREQUENCY
3401	12:15	12:45	Temporarily Unavailable	4301	13:00	13:30	Temporarily Unavailable
SAIPAN TO TINIAN				TINIAN TO SAIPAN			
FLIGHT #	DEPARTURE	ARRIVAL	FREQUENCY	FLIGHT #	DEPARTURE	ARRIVAL	FREQUENCY
1201	7:00	7:15	Temporarily Unavailable	2101	7:30	7:45	Temporarily Unavailable
1202	8:00	8:15	Daily	2102	8:30	8:45	Daily
1203	9:00	9:15	Daily	2103	9:30	9:45	Daily
				2104	10:30	10:45	Daily
				2105	11:30	11:45	Daily
				2106	12:30	12:45	Temporarily Unavailable
				2107	13:30	13:45	Temporarily Unavailable
				2108	14:30	14:45	Daily
				2109	15:30	15:45	Daily
				2110	16:30	16:45	Daily
				2111	17:30	17:45	Daily
				2112	18:30	18:45	Temporarily Unavailable

Business

COVID-19 variant disrupts holiday travel but not shopping

NEWARK, N.J. (AP)—The latest COVID-19 variant is upending holiday plans for tens of thousands of travelers—but it didn't do much damage to holiday shopping.

Airlines canceled hundreds more flights Sunday, citing staffing problems tied to COVID-19, as the nation's travel woes extended beyond Christmas, with no clear indication when normal schedules would resume.

But shoppers shrugged off the omicron variant, and holiday sales rose at the fastest pace in 17 years, according to one spending measure.

Omicron is likely to slow the economy's unexpectedly strong rebound from last year's coronavirus recession by disrupting travel and discouraging some consumers from venturing out. The variant could also add more heat to already simmering inflation by forcing shutdowns at factories and ports, delaying shipments and driving up prices.

"A full reopening of the U.S. economy will be delayed yet again," said Robin Brooks, chief economist at the Institute of International Finance, a trade group of financial firms.

But it's not yet clear how deep the hurt will go or how long it will last.

For now, the variant is playing havoc with travel. More than 1,100 flights entering, leaving or flying within



Travelers queue up for shuttle buses to carry them to rental car lots at Denver International Airport Sunday, Dec. 26, 2021, in Denver. AP

the U.S. were called off, according to the flight-tracking website FlightAware. That figure was up from nearly 1,000 on Saturday. About 130 flights were already canceled for Monday.

Delta, United, JetBlue and American have blamed omicron for staffing shortages that forced cancellations.

"This was unexpected," United spokesperson Maddie King said of the variant's effect on staffing.

Globally, airlines scrapped more than 2,700 flights as of Sunday evening, nearing the more than 2,800 cancellations

the day before, FlightAware's data showed. The site does not say why flights were canceled.

JetBlue scrapped 11% of its flights Sunday. Delta and United both canceled 5%, according to FlightAware. The three airlines canceled more than 10% of their scheduled flights on Saturday.

Mason Herlocker waited Sunday at Newark Liberty International Airport in New Jersey to pick up his girlfriend, who was coming in from Paris. Her flight was delayed for four hours.

It took her five hours to get a COVID-19 test the day before

to enter the U.S. She's visiting for three weeks, and Herlocker said he fears that she will get stuck here if she doesn't have a negative test result before trying to return home to France.

Worried about his parents getting sick, Herlocker recently got a booster shot and encouraged others to get theirs, too. He said he doesn't believe an end to the pandemic is in sight.

"I'm of the opinion that this is the new normal," Herlocker said. "I don't foresee (the virus) going away any time soon."

Aneesh Abhyankar flew in from Atlanta on Sunday and was waiting for a flight to India.

Outlets marred by dwindling public interest in news in '21

NEW YORK (AP)—The presidential election, pandemic and racial reckoning were stories that drove intense interest and engagement to news outlets in 2020. To a large degree, 2021 represented the inevitable hangover.

Various metrics illustrate the dwindling popularity of news content.

Cable news networks were the main form of evening entertainment for millions of Americans last year. In 2021, weekday prime-time viewership dropped 38% at CNN, 34% at Fox News Channel and 25% at MSNBC, according to the Nielsen company.

The decline was less steep but still significant at broadcast television evening newscasts: 12% at ABC's "World News Tonight" and the "CBS Evening News," 14% at NBC's "Nightly News," Nielsen said.

The Trump era saw explosive subscriber growth for some digital news sites like The New York Times and Washington Post. Yet readers aren't spending as much time there; Comscore said the number of unique visitors to the Post's site was down 44% in November compared to November 2020, and down 34% at the Times.

While a Dec. 23 headline on the Los Angeles Times front page—"How Much More Can We Take?"—referred to COVID-19, it could easily be applied to the news appetite in general.

For the most part, smart news executives knew the peaks of 2020 were not sustainable.

"It was entirely predictable," said news media analyst Ken Doctor.

Perhaps that was most obvious at the cable news networks. They built a prime-time model almost entirely focused on political combat during the Trump years, which made it difficult for them to pivot to something different, said Tom Rosenstiel, a journalism professor at the University of Maryland.

"You become, to some extent, a prisoner of the audience you built," Rosenstiel said.

Those networks remain focused on politics even as viewership interest wanes. The media monitoring company NewsWhip looked at 14 million political articles online last year and found

they had an average of 924 engagements, or social media interactions. The 13.5 million articles NewsWhip has traced in 2021 had an average of 321 engagements.

To a certain extent, these outlets have turned elsewhere for revenue opportunities, Doctor said. CNN is preparing to debut a new streaming service early next year, and recently poached Fox News' Chris Wallace to join that effort.

Fox News, while doubling down on conservative commentary following perceived threats from outlets like Newsmax and OANN, directed fans to its Fox Nation streaming service. Arguably Fox's most attention-getting programming of the year was a documentary on the Jan. 6 Capitol riot by Tucker Carlson, that asserted it was an effort to silence Trump supporters.

Both CNN and MSNBC face key programming decisions in the new year. CNN must replace its most popular host, Chris Cuomo, who was fired after it was revealed how he helped his brother through a political scandal. MSNBC must replace Brian Williams in its lineup and will most likely see its most popular personality, Rachel Maddow, cut back on her hours.

Although usage of the Times' digital site is down, the company passed 8 million subscriptions and is on pace to grow further. Doctor said the Times has done an effective job of diversifying beyond politics, most notably with its Wirecutter service of consumer recommendations.

Leaders at the Post have wrestled with how to deal their readers' dependence on political fare, according to the Wall Street Journal. The company is looking internationally for growth opportunities, Doctor said, a focus that plays to the strength of its new executive editor, Sally Buzbee.

"People to some degree have focused inward," Rosenstiel said. "They're getting the news that they need but it's not as much news as it was a year ago."

Particularly for the national news outlets, Rosenstiel said 2021 may best be remembered as a transitional year away from the frenzied news pace of the Trump years.

Despite supply issues and omicron, holiday sales rise 8.5%

By **PAUL WISEMAN** and **ANNE D'INNOCENZIO**
AP BUSINESS WRITERS

Holiday sales rose at the fastest pace in 17 years, even as shoppers grappled with higher prices, product shortages and a raging new COVID-19 variant in the last few weeks of the season, according to one spending measure.

Mastercard SpendingPulse, which tracks all kinds of payments including cash and debit cards, reported Sunday that holiday sales had risen 8.5% from a year earlier. Mastercard SpendingPulse had expected an 8.8% increase.

The results, which covered Nov. 1 through Dec. 24, were fueled by purchases of clothing and jewelry.

Holiday sales were up 10.7% compared with the pre-pandemic 2019 holiday period.

By category, clothing rose 47%, jewelry 32%, electronics 16%. Online sales were up 11% from a year ago and 61% from 2019. Department stores registered a 21% increase over 2020.



A shopper pushes her cart full of items down an aisle during a Black Friday sale at Macy's, Friday, Nov. 26, 2021, in Indianapolis. AP

After omicron hit, some consumers stayed home and shifted their spending to e-commerce—but sales stayed strong. "I feel really good about how the season played out," said Steve Sadove, senior adviser to Mastercard and former CEO of Saks Inc. "When people feel a little bit uncomfortable, you'll see a little bit of a pickup in online and a little bit of a slowdown

in store performance."

A broader picture will be revealed next month when the National Retail Federation, the nation's largest retail trade group, comes out with its combined two-month results in mid-January. The results will be based on an analysis of the November and December sales figures from the Commerce Department. Analysts will also be dissecting the fourth-quarter

financial results from different retailers that are slated to be released in February.

Overall, analysts had expected a strong holiday season, fueled by early shopping that started back in October in anticipation of a product shortage. Consumers were also determined to celebrate the holidays after a muted one a year ago. Still, November saw a slowdown in retail sales, in part because of the early shopping. And omicron, which has fast become the dominant version of the virus in the United States, has now spoiled holiday plans for many Americans who have had to cancel gatherings last minute.

The National Retail Federation said early in December that holiday sales were on track to beat its already record-breaking forecasts for an increase of 8.5% to 10.5% compared to the year-ago period. Holiday sales increased 8.2% in 2020 when shoppers, locked down during the early part of the pandemic, splurged on pajamas and home goods, mostly online.

Nation

COLFAX, Calif. (AP)—A major Christmas week-end storm caused whiteout conditions and closed key highways amid blowing snow in mountains of Northern California and Nevada, with forecasters warning that travel in the Sierra Nevada could be difficult for several days.

Authorities near Reno said

three people were injured in a 20-car pileup on Interstate 395, where drivers described limited visibility on Sunday. Further west, a 70-mile (112-kilometer) stretch of Interstate 80 was shut until at least Monday from Colfax, California, through the Lake Tahoe region to the Nevada state line.

The California Department of Transportation also closed

many other roads while warning of slippery conditions for motorists.

"Expect major travel delays on all roads," the National Weather Service office in Reno, Nevada, said Sunday on Twitter. "Today is the type of day to just stay home if you can. More snow is on the way too!"

The weather service issued a winter storm warning for

greater Lake Tahoe until 1 a.m. Tuesday because of possible "widespread whiteout conditions" and wind gusts that could top 45 mph (72 kph).

Turbulent weather stretched from San Diego to Seattle. More than a foot (0.3 meters) of snow was reported near Port Angeles on Washington state's Puget Sound. Portland, Oregon received a dusting, but the city was expected to get

another 2.5 inches (6 centimeters) by Monday morning, according to the weather service.

In California, rockslides caused by heavy rain closed more than 40 miles (64 kilometers) of coastal Highway 1 in the Big Sur region south of the San Francisco Bay Area. There was no estimate for the reopening of the scenic stretch that is frequently shut after wet weather.

The latest in a series of blustery storms hit Southern California with heavy rain and wind that flooded streets and knocked down power lines late Saturday. Powerful gusts toppled trees, damaged carports and blew a track-and-field shed from a Goleta high school into a front yard two blocks away, according to the Santa Barbara County Fire Department. No injuries were reported.

Downtown Portland, Ore., and the Tilikum Crossing Bridge were dusted in snow Sunday, Dec. 26, 2021.

AP



Major storm dumps snow, closes mountain routes in California

Missouri woman charged with killing boyfriend with a sword

CAPE GIRARDEAU, Mo. (AP)—A Missouri woman has been charged with killing her boyfriend with a sword on Christmas Eve.

Cape Girardeau Police said 32-year-old Brittany Wilson was found outside the home she shared with her boyfriend Friday night with blood on her clothing, and a sword was lying in the front yard. Cape Gi-

rardeau is in southeast Missouri about 115 miles (185.07 kilometers) south of St. Louis.

KFVS television reported that a woman had called police shortly after 11 p.m. Friday to report that she had killed her boyfriend with a sword.



Wilson

After officers arrested Wilson, they went inside the home and found her boyfriend, 34-year-old Harrison Stephen Foster, dead with several fresh stab wounds.

Wilson told police that she and Foster had taken methamphetamine earlier in the

day. She also told investigators that she believed Foster had several other entities living in his body, and she was setting him free by stabbing him.

Wilson was being held Sunday in lieu of \$2 million bond. She has been charged with first-degree murder and armed criminal action. It was not immediately known if Wilson had an attorney to speak on her behalf.

Alex Jones' wife arrested on domestic violence charge

DALLAS (AP)—The wife of conspiracy theorist Alex Jones was arrested Christmas Eve on a domestic violence charge that the right-wing provocateur said stems from a "medication imbalance."

Sheriff's deputies took Erika Wulff Jones into custody and booked her into an Austin jail around 8:45 p.m. Friday. Jail records show the 43-year-old faces misdemeanor charges of assault causing bodily injury to a family member and resisting arrest, search or transport. She had not received a bond Saturday afternoon.

Alex Jones, an Austin resident and founder of the right-wing media group Infowars, declined Saturday to say whether he'd been injured or elaborate on what happened beyond that he believes it was related to his wife's recent change of medication.

"It's a private family matter that happened on Christmas Eve," Jones told The Associated Press in a brief interview. "I love my wife

and care about her and it appears to be some kind of medication imbalance."

The Travis County Sheriff's Office did not immediately respond to a request Christmas Day for the report on Wulff Jones' arrest and a spokeswoman said she could not provide more information. An attorney for Wulff Jones did not immediately respond to a request for comment.

Jones sued this week seeking to block subpoenas he'd been issued by the House committee investigating the Jan. 6 insurrection at the U.S. Capitol. Jones spoke at a rally in support of then-President Donald Trump that proceeded the riot and his Infowars colleague, Owen Shroyer, was charged with crimes related to it in August. Shroyer has said he's "innocent of the charges."

Jones said his wife's arrest "doesn't concern my politics" and that "it wasn't some kind of personal hateful thing or anything."

Ghislaine Maxwell turns 60 behind bars as verdict looms

NEW YORK (AP)—Ghislaine Maxwell reached her 60th birthday behind bars Saturday as she awaited the outcome of her sex trafficking trial.

The British socialite is scheduled to return to a Manhattan courthouse Monday to await word from a jury entering its third full day of talks after hearing over two dozen witnesses and viewing dozens of exhibits over three weeks.

Messages sent to her lawyer and a website where items expressing support for Maxwell are regularly posted

were not returned Saturday.

Prosecutors said in their closing arguments last Monday that the crucial evidence was the testimony of four women who say they were sexually abused as teenagers by financier Jeffrey Epstein with help from Maxwell when she was his girlfriend, and later when she morphed into his close confidante and an employee valued highly enough that he gave her over \$20 million.

Prosecutors called her the "lady of the house" from 1994 to 2004, saying she re-

cruited and groomed teenagers as young as 14 to meet Epstein's seemingly insatiable need to be touched by vulnerable girls who came from impoverished and despairing backgrounds or who counted on his claims of wealth and connections to aid their quests for success and fame in the performance arts.

Defense lawyers, though, say she was a U.S. government scapegoat after Epstein killed himself in the Manhattan federal jail cell where he was awaiting his own sex trafficking trial in August

2019. They said the memories of her accusers were corrupted by the passage of time and the influence of lawyers steering them toward multi-million-dollar payouts from a fund set up to compensate Epstein victims.

The jury already has asked to review the testimony of the four women, along with former Epstein housekeeper Juan Patricio Alessi, but they have given little hint of their overall progress on six charges, including a sex trafficking count that carries a potential penalty of up to 40 years in prison.

World



In this photo provided by the Karenni Nationalities Defense Force, vehicles smolder in Hpruso township, Kayah state, Myanmar, Friday, Dec. 24, 2021. AP

Massacre aftermath photos stoke outrage in Myanmar

BANGKOK (AP)—Photos of the aftermath of a Christmas Eve massacre in eastern Myanmar that reportedly left more than 30 people, including women and children, dead and burned in their vehicles, have spread on social media in the country, fueling outrage against the military that took power in February.

The photos showed the charred bodies of over 30 people in three burned-out vehicles who were reportedly shot by government troops as they were fleeing combat. The accounts could not be independently verified.

The international aid group Save the Children said that two of its staffers were missing in the massacre, which sparked outrage against the military that took power after ousting the elected government of Aung San Suu Kyi. Save the Children said it was suspending operations in the region.

On Sunday, the U.S. Embassy in Myanmar said it was appalled by the “barbaric attack in Kayah state that killed at least 35 civilians, including women and children.”

“We will continue to press for accountability for the perpetrators of the ongoing campaign of violence against the people of Burma,” it said in a statement.

A villager who said he went to the scene told The Associated Press that the victims had fled the fighting between armed resistance groups and Myanmar’s army near Koi Ngan village, which is just beside Mo So, on Friday. He said they were killed after they were arrested by

troops while heading to refugee camps in the western part of the township.

Save the Children said that two of its staff who were traveling home for the holidays after conducting humanitarian response work in a nearby community were “caught up in the incident and remain missing.”

“We have confirmation that their private vehicle was attacked and burned out,” the group added in a statement. “The military reportedly forced people from their cars, arrested some, killed others and burned their bodies.”

The government has not commented on the allegations, but a report in the state-run Myanmar Alinn daily newspaper on Saturday said that the fighting near Mo So broke out on Friday when members of ethnic guerrilla forces, known as the Karenni National Progressive Party, and those opposed to the military drove in “suspicious” vehicles and attacked security forces after refusing to stop.

The newspaper report said they included new members who were going to attend training to fight the army, and that the seven vehicles they were traveling in were destroyed in a fire. It gave no further details about the killings.

The witness told the AP the remains were burned beyond recognition, and children’s and women’s clothes were found together with medical supplies and food.

“The bodies were tied with ropes before being set on fire,” said the witness, who spoke on condition of ano-

nymity because he feared for his safety.

He did not see the moment they were killed, but said he believed some of them were Mo So villagers who reportedly got arrested by troops on Friday. He denied that those captured were members of locally organized militia groups.

Myanmar’s independent media reported on Friday that 10 Mo So villagers including children were arrested by the army. The media said that four members of the local paramilitary Border Guard Forces who went to negotiate for their release were reportedly tied up and shot in the head by the military.

The witness said the villagers and anti-government militia groups left the bodies as military troops arrived near Mo So while the bodies were being prepared for cremation.

“It’s a heinous crime and the worst incident during Christmas. We strongly condemn that massacre as a crime against humanity,” said Banyar Khun Aung, director of the Karenni Human Rights Group.

Earlier this month, government troops were also accused of rounding up villagers, some believed to be children, tying them up and slaughtering them. An opposition leader, Dr. Sasa, who uses only one name, said the civilians were burned alive.

A video of the aftermath of the Dec. 7 assault—apparently retaliation for an attack on a military convoy—showed the charred bodies of 11 people lying in a circle amid what appeared to be the remains of a hut.

World

Desmond Tutu, South Africa’s apartheid fighter, dies at 90

JOHANNESBURG (AP)—Desmond Tutu, South Africa’s Nobel Peace Prize-winning icon, an uncompromising foe of apartheid and a modern-day activist for racial justice and LGBT rights, died Sunday at 90. South Africans, world leaders and people around the globe mourned the death of the man viewed as the country’s moral conscience.

Tutu worked passionately, tirelessly and non-violently to tear down apartheid—South Africa’s brutal, decades-long regime of oppression against its Black majority that ended in 1994.

The buoyant, blunt-spoken clergyman used his pulpit as the first Black bishop of Johannesburg and later as the Anglican Archbishop of Cape Town, as well as frequent public demonstrations, to galvanize public opinion against racial inequity, both at home and globally.

Nicknamed “the Arch,” the diminutive Tutu became a towering figure in his nation’s history, comparable to fellow Nobel laureate Nelson Mandela, a prisoner during white rule who became South Africa’s first Black president. Tutu and Mandela shared a commitment to building a better, more equal South Africa.

Tutu’s death on Sunday “is another chapter of bereavement in our nation’s farewell to a generation of outstanding South Africans who have bequeathed us a liberated South Africa,” South African Presi-



US President Barack Obama presents a 2009 Presidential Medal of Freedom to Desmond Tutu, widely regarded as “South Africa’s moral conscience,” who was a leading anti-apartheid activist in South Africa., Wednesday, Aug. 12, 2009, in the East Room of the White House in Washington. AP

dent Cyril Ramaphosa said.

Tutu died peacefully at the Oasis Frail Care Center in Cape Town, his trust said. He had been hospitalized several times since 2015 after being diagnosed with prostate cancer in 1997.

“He turned his own misfortune into a teaching opportunity to raise awareness and reduce the suffering of others,” said the Tutu trust.

Former U.S. President Barack Obama hailed Tutu as “a moral compass for me and so many others. A universal spirit, Archbishop Tutu was grounded in the struggle for liberation and justice in his own country, but also concerned with injustice everywhere. He never lost his impish sense of humor and willingness to find humanity in his adversaries.”

A seven-day mourning pe-

riod is planned in Cape Town before Tutu’s burial, including a two-day lying in state, an ecumenical service and an Anglican requiem mass at St. George’s Cathedral in Cape Town. The southern city’s landmark Table Mountain will be lit up in purple, the color of the robes Tutu wore as archbishop.

Throughout the 1980s—when South Africa was gripped by anti-apartheid violence and a state of emergency gave police and the military sweeping powers—Tutu was one of the most prominent Black leaders able to speak out against abuses.

A lively wit lightened Tutu’s hard-hitting messages and warmed otherwise grim protests, funerals and marches. Plucky and tenacious, he was a formidable force with a canny talent for quoting apt scriptures to harness support for change.

WORLD BRIEFS

7 of 8 injured in Mexico ride accident out of hospitals

MEXICO CITY (AP)—Authorities in Mexico City said Sunday that seven of the eight people injured in an accident on a ride at a holiday-season fair are out of danger and recovering at home. Authorities said an eighth victim, who was under 18, is making “satisfactory” progress at a local hospital. The victims were riding on a “swirling cups” ride of the small, towable type when the seats they were strapped into somehow came loose. The downtown Cuauhtémoc borough where the accident took place late Saturday said it would inspect all 153 of the privately operated, moveable rides installed as part of a Christmas tradition. It said it would shut them all down if there were any more mishaps.

Australia’s most populous state reports 1st omicron death

SYDNEY (AP)—Australia’s New South Wales state reported more than 6,000 new COVID-19 cases on Monday and confirmed its first death from the omicron variant. The fatal case was identified as a man in his 80s who was infected at an aged care facility in western Sydney. He was fully vaccinated but had underlying health conditions. New South Wales, the country’s

most populous state, reported 6,324 new infections Monday, a fall of 70 from the record number a day before. There were 524 people in hospitals, including 55 in intensive care. New measures came into force in New South Wales on Monday, including limits of one person per 2 square meters (22 square feet) in bars and restaurants and required “check-ins” with QR codes in hospitality venues.

Putin to mull options if West refuses guarantees on Ukraine

MOSCOW (AP)—Russian President Vladimir Putin said Sunday he would ponder a slew of options if the West fails to meet his push for security guarantees precluding NATO’s expansion to Ukraine. Earlier this month, Moscow submitted draft security documents demanding that NATO deny membership to Ukraine and other former Soviet countries and roll back its military deployments in Central and Eastern Europe. The Kremlin presented its security demand amid tensions over a Russian troop buildup near Ukraine in recent weeks that has fueled Western fears of a possible invasion. U.S. President Joe Biden warned Putin in a video call earlier this month that Russia will face “severe consequences” if it attacks Ukraine.

Overdrive

Kia Carnival is an impressive minivan with a crossover look

By LARRY PRINTZ
TRIBUNE NEWS SERVICE

Sometimes, you just need a minivan. SUVs can't match them when comes to their sheer volume, particularly for chores like carting four full-size suitcases and two carry-ons, not to mention two parents about to take their first post-pandemic vacation. That's a lot, but the 2022 Kia Carnival minivan can handle my parents' frequent changes of clothing. And it does so with a heavy dose of style.

The 2022 Kia Carnival replaces the Sedona in Kia's lineup, and comes on strong with a boxy crossover look that seems right at home alongside the incredibly popular Kia Telluride. Even twenty-something valets seem to like it, and who would have thought they'd be impressed by a minivan?

But it's hard not to be captivated, for it's clear that Kia did its homework.

Offered in ascending LX, EX, SX and SX Prestige trim, the Carnival wears styling details that help you forget what you're driving, such as the crisp lines on the clamshell hood, the flashy side window trim, and rear skid plates. But there's no mistaking it once you climb inside.

The SX Prestige that Kia provided for a weeklong test drive was generously equipped, and carried a base price of \$46,100, a \$14,000 premium above the \$32,100 base model.

Once ensconced, you'll find this is one cavernous Carnival, with 168 cubic feet of passenger space and as much as 145 cubic feet of cargo space. LX and SX Prestige models come with seven-passenger seating, while the EX and SX have eight passenger seating. Second-row seats can slide back and forth and are removable. The third row folds into the floor. Heated front seats



The 2022 Kia Carnival.

are standard on all but the LX, where they're optional. Second and third row heated seats are standard on the SX Prestige. As you might expect, base models are covered in cloth, while EX and SX models have fake leather. The SX Prestige gets the real thing.

All Carnivals come with an 8-inch touchscreen display with wireless Apple CarPlay and Android Auto, which is wireless when the dual rear screen package is offered. Built-in Wi-Fi and wireless charging are also offered, although there are up to nine USB ports and two 110-volt outlets.

And it's filled with thoughtful touches that parents will appreciate.

A rear occupant alert system employs ultrasonic sensors that alerts you if a child, person or pet remains in rear seats after you've shut off and locked the vehicle. There's also an in-cabin intercom for conversing

with those in the rear. You can also keep an eye out for what's happening back there, thanks to an in-cabin camera that includes night vision.

As you'd expect with a family hauler, there's a generous array of standard safety gear, including forward collision avoidance assist, blind-spot avoidance assist, rear cross-traffic collision avoidance assist, parking distance warn-

ing, lane keeping assist, high beam assist, and driver attention warning.

Powering this mobile parental palace is a double-overhead-cam 3.5-liter V-6 rated at 290 horsepower and mated to an 8-speed automatic transmission. Front-wheel drive is standard; all-wheel-drive is not offered. But it can tow a reasonable 3,500 pounds. It's rated by the EPA at 22 mpg in

mixed driving, which the test car returned after nearly 300 miles of test driving.

The V-6 engine provides enough muscle to move this minivan with the requisite grunt. Overall performance is well-balanced, with a comfortable ride and controlled body motions over bumps. The Carnival remained unruffled during cornering, and road noise was minimal up front.

NUTS & BOLTS

- Base price: \$32,100
- Engine: 3.5-liter DOHC V6
- Horsepower/Torque: 290/262 pound-feet
- EPA fuel economy (city/highway): 19/26 mpg
- Observed fuel economy: 22 mpg
- Fuel required: 87 Octane
- Length/Width/Height: 203/78.5/69.9 inches
- Ground clearance: 6.8 inches
- Payload: 1,440 pounds
- Cargo capacity: 40.2-145.1 cubic feet
- Towing capacity: 3,500 pounds

The same isn't true in the second row, where passengers volunteered that the Carnival had a lot of road noise. They also complained about seat comfort, with the second row Captain's chairs proving to be too firm. Yet the driver's seat seemed the ideal of combination of comfort and support. Controls are logical and easy to use, and Kia's infotainment user interface is easy to use, thanks to its intuitive design.

If there's one thing that needs changing, it's the rear tailgate. A beep sounds when it's open, and keeps beeping annoyingly until you close it. This is safety overkill and exasperating.

So where's the battery in my hybrid?

Q : Wife had a 2010 Prius and we got stranded twice and needed a new starting battery. She now has a 2018 Kia Niro hybrid and I want to replace the starting battery but can't get an answer from Kia customer service or several dealers as to if the Niro hybrid even has a starting battery. If it doesn't have one, what starts the gas engine?

A: All hybrid vehicles have a 12-volt battery. It not only starts the internal combustion engine, but it also powers the accessories. Starting in 2017, Kia installed a lithium-ion battery instead of a traditional lead-acid battery under the rear seat.

Q: Recently I had the oil changed in my 2017 Avalon. My receipt indicated five quarts of synthetic oil. The owner's manual calls for six quarts. The dipstick showed full, but I added a half quart of oil just to be safe. Can you explain this?

A: Did they change the filter? The old filter could hold residual oil. Or, perhaps, they installed six quarts and only charged for five. Was it your birthday?

Q: I have a 2020 Mazda CX-9 with a G 2.5 Turbo engine. At 12,000 miles I experienced engine lurching when stopped. The dealer made the warranty repair, which included "Clean EGR and reprogram PCM" (quoting from my invoice here), and the car has run fine since. But upgrading to 93-octane gas was recommended, quite an unpleasant surprise, especially with the rising price of gas. I'm now paying \$1 more a gallon for gas.

A: We checked the owner's manual for your car, and it states the 87-octane gas is the juice to use. Don't waste your money on high-priced gasoline that keeps getting priced higher. You got some bad intel from whoever suggested using premium gas.

Q: My son is frustrated by the problem he is having with

MOTORMOUTH

By BOB WEBER
Tribune News Service

Send questions along with name and town to motormouth.tribune@gmail.com.

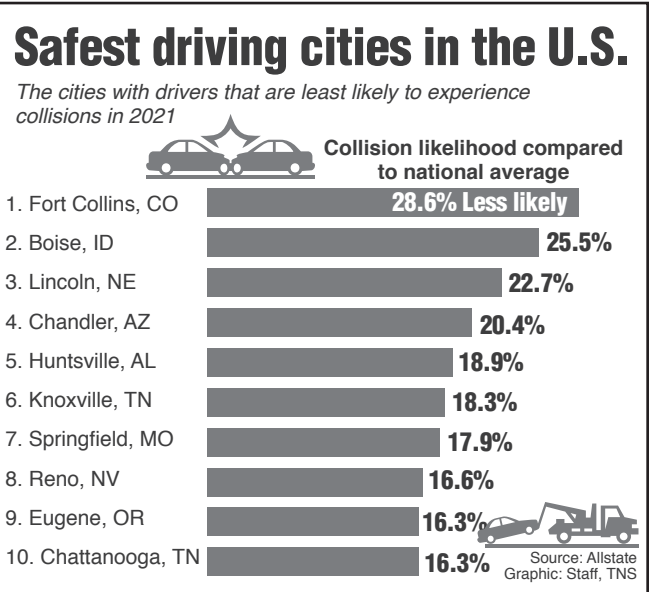


his 2000 Honda CRV. It does not start and when we jump start it and take it to various mechanics, no one seems to be able to solve the problem. We have had the battery replaced and checked repeatedly, to no avail. The Honda dealer that we took the car to suggested that he dump this car and buy a replacement, after charging \$82 for a so-called analysis.

A: First, I suggest you take the car to one of the major parts stores where they will do a battery and charging system analysis for free. (Yeah, they hope you will need a battery, but won't lie to you.) If everything checks out, have a pro mechanic look for weak connections, especially a weak ground connection from the battery. Also check for dirty battery terminal connections. Currently, car prices—especially used—are out of sight.

Q: I only use premium gas for my lawn tractor, leaf blower and two of our cars. I add Sta-Bil to my summer car and lawn tractor; the other gas equipment I run dry. I have used approximately one-half the bottle of Sta-Bil for winterization of 2020/21 and 2021/22. Will Sta-Bil degrade between now and the fall of 2022?

A: It does not last forever. In fact, there is space on the back label for you to write in the date you opened the bottle. Gold Eagle (the maker of Sta-Bil) says on their website: "An opened, but tightly capped, bottle of Sta-Bil fuel stabilizer is effective for about two years."



Life & Style

‘Spider-Man’ surpasses \$1B globally in second weekend

By **LINDSEY BAHR**
AP FILM WRITER

Peter Parker’s good fortune continued over the holiday weekend as Hollywood prepares to close the books on a turbulent 2021. Even with some mighty competition from new Matrix and Sing movies, and rising concerns over the omicron variant, “Spider-Man: No Way Home” stayed in the No. 1 spot and netted a few more milestones too including crossing the \$1 billion mark globally.

According to studio estimates Sunday “Spider-Man” added \$81.5 million over the three-day weekend, down 69% from its first weekend. The Sony and Marvel film has now grossed \$467 million from North American theaters, more than doubling the domestic grosses of 2021’s previous No. 1 film, “Shang-Chi and the Legend of the Ten Rings.”

With \$587.1 million from 61 overseas markets, in just 12 days of release, “Spider-Man” has grossed \$1.05 billion globally. It’s the first film of the pandemic to cross \$1 billion

1. **“Spider-Man: No Way Home,”** \$81.5 million.
2. **“Sing 2,”** \$23.8 million.
3. **“The Matrix Resurrections,”** \$12 million.
4. **“The King’s Man,”** \$6.4 million.
5. **“American Underdog,”** \$6.2 million.
6. **“West Side Story,”** \$2.8 million.
7. **“Licorice Pizza,”** \$2.3 million.
8. **“A Journal For Jordan,”** \$2.2 million.
9. **“Encanto,”** \$2 million.
10. **“83,”** \$1.8 million.

and is tied with “Star Wars: The Force Awakens” for being the third-fastest film ever to do so—and this without the benefit of its release in China.

Universal’s “Sing 2” came in second place with an estimated \$23.8 million, while Warner Bros.’ “The Matrix Resurrections” grossed \$12 million to take third place.

The animated musical “Sing 2” features high-profile celebrity talent including Matthew McConaughey, Scarlett Johansson, Reese Witherspoon and Bono, as well as a jukebox soundtrack full of well-known hits. Since its release

Wednesday, it’s made \$41 million (\$1.6 million of that came from Thanksgiving weekend showings) from North America and \$65 million worldwide.

“We’re extraordinarily pleased,” said Jim Orr, Universal’s president of domestic distribution.

Orr said the stellar CinemaScore (A+) and audience scores suggest that the film will continue to perform well in the next few weeks, when many kids are still out of school for the holidays.

The fourth Matrix also opened on Wednesday and has earned an estimated \$22.5 million in its first five days in North America. The film, directed by Lana Wachowski and starring Keanu Reeves and Carrie-Anne Moss, is currently streaming on HBO Max as well. Globally, it’s grossed \$69.8 million to date.

While the studio was hoping for a stronger box office, Jeff Goldstein, Warner Bros.’ head of domestic distribution, said the movie achieved what they were looking for as an overall strategy including HBO Max.

“The Matrix Resurrec-



This image released by Sony Pictures shows Tom Holland, left, and Benedict Cumberbatch in Columbia Pictures’ “Spider-Man: No Way Home.”

SONY PICTURES VIA AP

tions” is the last of the 18 Warner Bros. films released in 2021 to debut both in theaters and on HBO Max simultaneously. Starting in 2022, the studio will have a 45-day exclusive theatrical window on their films.

In fourth place was Disney and 20th Century’s “The King’s Man,” a prequel to the action-comedy Kingsman series starring Ralph Fiennes. It came in slightly under expectations with \$6.4 million from the weekend

and \$10 million from its first five days. The audience skewed heavily male (65%).

The Kurt Warner biopic “American Underdog” opened on Christmas Day and has made an estimated \$6.2 million in its two days in release to round out the top five. Zachary Levi stars as Warner, the quarterback who went from undrafted free agent to Hall of Famer.

Paul Thomas Anderson’s “Licorice Pizza” expanded nationwide on Christmas, af-

ter playing in limited release for a month, and added \$2.3 million bringing its total to \$3.7 million. And right behind it was the Denzel Washington-directed drama “A Journal For Jordan,” which to \$2.2 million.

With just a few days left in 2021, the North American box office is currently sitting at \$4.3 billion and is likely to net out around \$4.4 billion. Pre-pandemic, it was normal for a year’s box office to surpass \$11 billion.

“To say was a roller-coaster year is an understatement,” said Paul Dergarabedian, the senior media analyst for Comscore, Inc. “The marketplace is still facing challenges from the pandemic, but what an amazing capper to one of the most incredible years ever at the box office.”

He added: “The future of the movie theater a year ago was a big question mark, and a year later it’s here to stay.”

Estimated ticket sales for Friday through Sunday at U.S. and Canadian theaters, according to Comscore. Final domestic figures will be released Monday.

UK police arrest armed intruder on Windsor Castle grounds

LONDON (AP)—British police arrested a man armed with a weapon on the grounds of Windsor Castle on Saturday.

Thames Valley police said the security breach took place at 8:30 a.m. on Christmas Day. The 19-year-old from Southampton is in custody.

“The man has been arrested on suspicion of breach or trespass of a protected site and possession of an offensive weapon. He remains in custody at this time,” Thames Valley

Police Superintendent Rebecca Mears said. “We can confirm security processes were triggered within moments of the man entering the grounds and he did not enter any buildings.”

Members of the royal family have been informed.

Queen Elizabeth II is spending the Christmas holidays at Windsor, having decided not to stay at Sandringham, the royal estate in eastern England where she traditionally spends the festive season with family.

Singer Tom Walker lauds Kate’s piano skills after recording

LONDON (AP)—Scottish singer Tom Walker praised the piano skills of the Duchess of Cambridge after the pair recorded a Christmas tune that was shown during a carol concert.

Walker, 30, performed a new song, “For Those Who Can’t Be Here,” accompanied by the 39-year-old Kate playing the piano, in a prerecorded segment shown during the concert broadcast on ITV on Friday.

Walker said he had kept the performance a secret—even from his mother.

“She was in floods of tears watching it on the telly,” he told the BBC. “It was beautiful.”

Walker had performed at a charity event in front of the duchess, and when asked to play at the carol service he offered to perform a song the public hadn’t yet heard.

“So I sent it over to the team and they absolutely loved it,

and then a week later they came back and said ‘Um, would it be alright if the duchess played along with you?’” he recalled. “And I was like ‘What?’”

The pair rehearsed for a few weeks.

“She picked it up so well, it’s really not easy to go from not playing with other musicians for like 10 years to jumping straight in with like a whole band you’ve never met and camera crews doing live takes that’s being filmed

in Westminster Abbey so I thought it just went so well,” he said. “She’s (a) very talented musician.”

Kate and Prince William spearheaded the program, “Royal Carols: Together At Christmas.” The Westminster Abbey event was attended by those who had spent time with Kate and William during recent engagements.

Walker rose to fame after the release of his single “Leave a Light On,” in June 2018.

Man’s weight gain a turn-off for wife

DEAR ABBY: I’m in my late 30s and have been married for seven years. My husband and I have two young children, a beautiful home, good jobs, etc. However, over the last few years, I have lost my attraction to him.

I’m not superficial, but he has gained more than 40 pounds since we met, and he refuses to eat healthy or exercise. He watched me spend countless hours working out to lose all my baby weight. We are rarely intimate anymore, and when we are I do it out of obligation.

I know these things happen, but he seems to be happy. I think if I told him I wanted to leave, he would be floored. Divorced friends of mine who have young children have advised me against it, and say my children’s happiness should come before mine. Others say if I’m not happy, the kids won’t be happy. I can manage living this life for them, but I feel like I’m too young to cheat myself out of some of my best years. Am I being selfish or smart?

WEIGHTY SUBJECT IN NEW YORK

DEAR WEIGHTY SUBJECT: Before your marriage deteriorates further, have a frank discussion with your husband. He seems to be happy because he doesn’t know what’s going on in your head. For reasons that go beyond

animal attraction—including the welfare of his children—he needs to make some lifestyle changes and get a handle on his health. I am hoping that when you convey the message to him, he will be receptive. If not, please try marriage counseling before you consult a lawyer.

■ ■ ■ ■

DEAR ABBY: I’m in my early 40s. A few months ago, I was diagnosed with stage 4 breast cancer. I keep reading the five-year survival rate is only 28%, and I’m concerned that despite receiving treatment (hormone therapy injections), I don’t have many years left. The cancer has been found in my spine and pelvis as well. I am a person of faith, so I’m not afraid of death. I’m just worried about leaving my daughter behind, along with friends and family.

My question is, should I make a will? I live in an apartment and don’t have many assets except for some savings. I plan to start a trust, so my daughter will receive that money at the appropriate time. I have never had a reason in the past for a will. I don’t know what sorts of things go into a will. I also have a 2-year-old cat, and now I’m worried he will outlive me. I don’t want him to have to go back to the Humane Society if I pass on. He’s like a child to me, and I only want the best for him.

MAKING PLANS FOR THE FUTURE

DEAR ABBY

By **ABIGAIL VAN BUREN**
FROM UNIVERSAL PRESS SYNDICATE

Dear Abby is written by Abigail Van Buren, also known as Jeanne Phillips, and was founded by her mother, Pauline Phillips. Contact Dear Abby at www.DearAbby.com or P.O. Box 69440, Los Angeles, CA 90069.



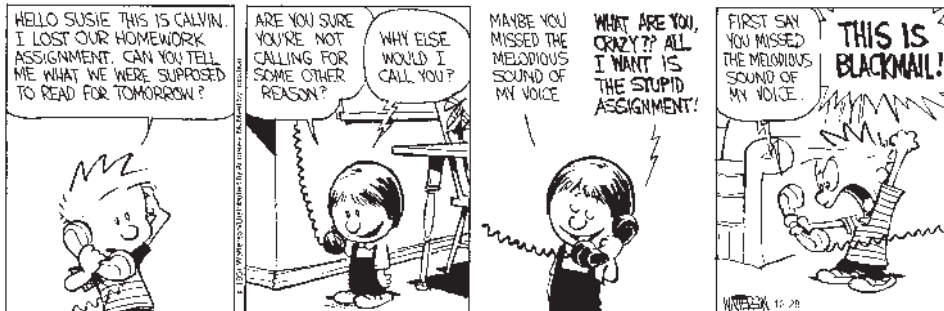
DEAR MAKING PLANS: Because you have financial assets, a daughter and a beloved pet you want to provide for in the event of your death, it’s important that you consult an attorney NOW about ANY end-of-life documents you need to have in place. You may decide you need more directives than just a will, which will give you peace of mind and guarantee your wishes are carried out.

What teens need to know about sex, drugs, AIDS and getting along with peers and parents is in “What Every Teen Should Know.” Send your name and mailing address, plus check or money order for \$8 (U.S. funds) to: Dear Abby, Teen Booklet, P.O. Box 447, Mount Morris, IL 61054-0447. (Shipping and handling are included in the price.)

Pastimes

Calvin and Hobbes

By Bill Waterson



Garfield®

By Jim Davis



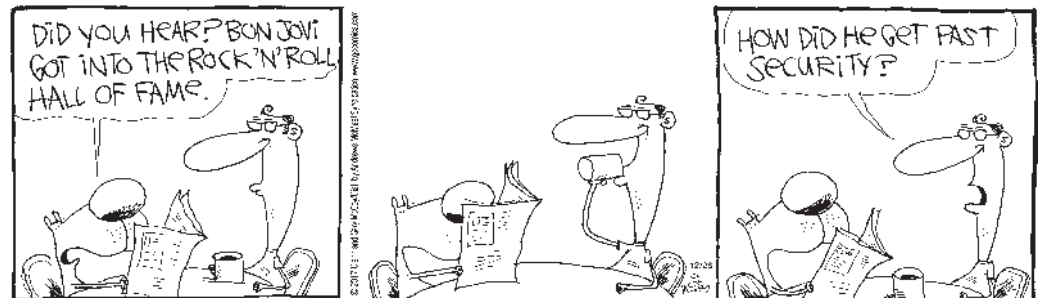
Adam@home

By Bryan Basset



The Duplex

By Glenn McCoy



CROSSWORD

By Eugene Sheffer

ACROSS

1 Rebuff
5 Billboards
8 Verdi
12 Law firm
13 Hindu
14 Hosp.
15 Redact
16 Rebate
18 Money-maker
20 Expels
21 Tolkien creature
22 Film ratings
23 Future oak
26 They're nuts
30 Tease
31 Secret agent
32 Pi
33 Reception feature
36 Tycoon
38 "Uh-huh"
39 Young lion

DOWN

40 Visibly
43 Store
47 Solvency
49 Gumbo
50 Caught in —
51 Expert
52 Check
53 Campus
54 Physique
55 Foun-dered

Solution time: 22 mins.

Yesterdays answer 12-28

CELEBRITIES BORN ON THIS DAY: Hayley Williams, 33; Jared Leto, 50; Gerard Depardieu, 73; John Amos, 82.

Happy Birthday: Recognize your strengths, and put them to the test. Focus on what you know. Pick up on what's trending and can help you stay ahead of any competition you encounter. Use the connections you have and innovative ideas to get ahead. Call in favors, and demonstrate what you have to offer. Personal growth is favored. Your numbers are 5, 11, 21, 27, 33, 35, 47.

ARIES (March 21-April 19): Don't give up what you have until you have a replacement in the bag. Gauge what's trending, and consider what's possible. Do the legwork necessary to make wise decisions. Don't let ego and emotions lead to a mistake you'll regret. ***

TAURUS (April 20-May 20): Think outside the box. It's your responsibility to change what you don't like and to pursue what makes you happy. Don't limit what you can do or give up on something you want. Take dedicated, passionate approaches to life and love. ***

GEMINI (May 21-June 20): Question your direction, and consider if you enjoy what you do and how you earn your living. Step outside your comfort zone, or at least investigate the possibilities that exist. Trust in your skills to help you reach your goal. *****

CANCER (June 21-July 22): Pay attention to what others say and do. A disciplined attitude and innovative plan will

help you broaden your perspective and reach your goal. A change will put you in a positive frame of mind and encourage you to settle down. **

LEO (July 23-Aug. 22): Time spent with an older friend or relative will be enlightening. Pay attention to what's being said, and incorporate a healthier attitude and lifestyle into your everyday routine. Challenge yourself to do things that are important to you. Satisfy your needs. ****

VIRGO (Aug. 23-Sept. 22): Consider how you earn your living and handle your money, and you'll find a way to cut costs and ease stress. Emotional spending or trying to buy love will lead to debt. A lifestyle adjustment will help you get back on track. ***

LIBRA (Sept. 23-Oct. 22): Stick to your plan. Make changes at home that will ease stress and encourage convenience and comfort. Get physical, and take care of unfinished business. Heading into the new year with a clean slate is worth celebrating. ***

SCORPIO (Oct. 23-Nov. 21): Think twice before you raise issues that may not go over well with a friend or relative. Keep the peace and focus on positive interaction. Simplify your life, and it will allow you time to pursue something satisfying. ***

SAGITTARIUS (Nov. 22-Dec. 21): Use common sense. If you act on your emotions, you are likely to make a mistake. Sit tight and explore your options. When uncertainty prevails, observation is necessary. Consider the long-term effects before you

EUGENIA LAST

THE LAST WORD IN ASTROLOGY

COPYRIGHT 2007
UNIVERSAL PRESS SYNDICATE

make a move. ****

CAPRICORN (Dec. 22-Jan. 19): Take physical action, and incorporate a change at home that will make your life easier. What you accomplish will lift your spirits. Look into something you want to explore in the new year. An educational pursuit or implementing a healthier lifestyle is encouraged. **

AQUARIUS (Jan. 20-Feb. 18): Discipline will be required when dealing with financial and emotional matters. Put your energy where it counts, and get ahead of the game where work responsibilities are concerned. You'll feel better if you have a clean slate heading into next year. *****

PISCES (Feb. 19-March 20): Take care of business, and all-out of an unnecessary disagreement. ***

Birthday Baby: You are persistent, outgoing and unique. You are spontaneous and enthusiastic.

⊕: Avoid conflicts; work behind the scenes. ☉: You can accomplish, but don't rely on others. ☿: Focus and you'll reach your goals. ♀: Aim high; start new projects. ♀♀: Nothing can stop you; go for gold.

SUDOKU

Conceptis Sudoku

By Dave Green

	6	3	5			1					
	1				8		3	7			
9					6				2		
	2	4							5		
3						7	8				
2			1							8	
6	5		9					4			
		1			5	9	6				

Difficulty Level ★★

12/28

©2012 Conceptis Puzzles, Dist. by King Features Syndicate, Inc.

Sudoku is a number-placing puzzle based on a 9x9 grid with several given numbers. The object is to place the numbers 1 to 9 in the empty squares so that each row, each column and each 3x3 box contains the same number only once. The difficulty level of the Conceptis Sudoku increases from Monday to Saturday.

Yesterday's Answer

7	3	6	4	8	9	5	2	1
2	5	8	6	1	7	9	3	4
9	1	4	3	5	2	6	8	7
4	6	1	7	3	8	2	9	5
3	9	2	1	4	5	7	6	8
5	8	7	9	2	6	4	1	3
1	2	5	8	6	4	3	7	9
6	7	3	5	9	1	8	4	2
8	4	9	2	7	3	1	5	6

©2012 King Features

WONDERWORD®

By DAVID OUELLET

HOW TO PLAY: All the words listed below appear in the puzzle — horizontally, vertically, diagonally and even backward. Find them, circle each letter of the word and strike it off the list. The leftover letters spell the WONDERWORD.

PANDORA RINGS

Solution: 7 letters

S C I S S A L C D A I S Y E P
P H L D N O M A I D O D Z S R
A A A O L A H A E L N I T E O
R R C P O I R T I A S Y L L M
K M E E E A T T B H L P R L I
L S L N I O A I I E S T A R S
E G A T N I V M N E A I E V E
P N T K R S M G E F T O P L E
O I E E T E A N L S I L E C N
R W M O R G O I E I O N I D I
D L N I E B N L E V N R I L H
R E N M B E E R E G C K O T S
A G E I S C A E D L O G E N Y
E N R T S I W T E R O U N D T
T A E R A U Q S S E L E M I T

© 2021 ArcNews/McMee Syndication www.wonderword.com

12/28

Angel Wings, Band, Beaded, Celestial, Charm, Circle, Classic, Daisy, Diamond, Engagement, Gold, Halo, Infinity, Knotted, Lace, Lines, Linked, Logo, Love, Metal, Open, Pave, Pearl, Promise, Ribbon, Rose, Round, Sell, Shape, Shimmering, Shine, Size, Solitaire, Sparkle, Square, Stars, Sterling, Stone, Style, Teardrop, Tiara, Timeless, Trio, Twist, Vintage

Yesterday's Answer: Photo

To purchase THE COLLECTED WONDERWORD, Volumes 50, 51 and 53 through 66, order on line at www.WonderWordBooks.com.

STUMPED?

For answers to today's crossword, call 1-900-226-5955! 99¢ per minute, touch-tone/rotary phones. (18+ only.) A King Features service, NYC.

Heat win 3rd straight, pull away from Magic, 93-83



MIAMI (AP)—This speaks to how highly the Miami Heat think of Omer Yurtseven. After his finest game as a pro, the Heat told him he's capable of even more.

Yurtseven scored 16 points and grabbed 15 rebounds in his first start, Jimmy Butler and Caleb Martin each scored 17 points in their returns and the Heat beat the Orlando Magic 93-83 on Sunday.

"You're seeing the skill level that he has," Heat coach Erik Spoelstra said.

Gabe Vincent and Max Strus each had 13 points for Miami.

Butler had missed 12 of Miami's last 13 games because of the injury. Martin had missed Miami's last seven games because of a stint in the NBA's health and safety protocols.

"I'm just grateful for the opportunity," said Yurtseven, who was called on to start because of injuries to Miami centers Bam Adebayo and DeWayne Dedmon.

Gary Harris scored 20 for Orlando, which got 14 from RJ Hampton, 13 from Franz Wagner and 12 from Hassani Gravett.

Orlando signed four players—Gravett among them—earlier this month to hardship deals after the Magic were hit by virus-related problems. Those deals are expiring.

"I was ready. I was ready at any given moment," Gravett said. "I knew coming into this year what could take place with COVID or injuries or



Miami Heat forward Jimmy Butler (22) dunks over Orlando Magic guard R.J. Hampton during the first half of an NBA basketball game, Sunday, Dec. 26, 2021, in Miami.

anything and was ready."

Hampton's 3-pointer with 4:42 left in the first gave Orlando a 21-12 lead, the biggest Magic cushion of the afternoon. Miami answered with a 12-3 run capped by a

layup from Udonis Haslem to pull into a tie, then took its first lead with 7:29 left in the half on a pair of free throws from Butler.

The Heat edge was only 42-39 at the half. But Miami

scored the first 10 points of the second half—getting four baskets from four different players, Strus, Yurtseven, Duncan Robinson and Vincent—to push the lead out to 13.

Orlando wouldn't go away. Hampton's 3-pointer with 6:03 left got the Magic within 80-72, but Miami scored the next eight and sealed the win when Strus hit a 3 with 3:14 left for an 88-72 edge.

"I think we did a really good job of competing all night and getting the looks we were looking for," Magic coach Jamahl Mosley said.

76ers 117, Wizards 96

In Washington, Joel Embiid had 36 points and 13 rebounds and a spat with Montrezl Harrell, Tobias Harris added 23 points and the Philadelphia 76ers beat the Washington Wizards 117-96 on Sunday night.

Philadelphia improved to 17-16 after dropping four of its last five.

Spencer Dinwiddie led Washington with 17 points. The Wizards also are 17-16.

With 3:04 left in the third, Harrell fouled Embiid, and the two exchanged words. Both were assessed technical fouls, and Embiid made the two free throws.

Thirty seconds later, Harrell pushed Embiid, yelled at him, and was given his second technical and ejected. Harrell, who didn't immediately leave the court was finally escorted the floor, and left shaking his head while Embiid waved him goodbye.

Cavaliers 144, Raptors 99

In Cleveland, Kevin Love and Darius Garland scored 22 points apiece and Cleveland tied its franchise record with 46 points in the third quarter to rout COVID-19 depleted Toronto.

Lauri Markkanen added 20 points and Garland had eight assists for Cleveland, which led by 47 points twice late in the fourth. The Cavaliers won their fifth in a row at home and made 22 3-pointers in a team-record 52 attempts.

Yuta Watanabe had career highs of 26 points and 13 rebounds for Toronto.

Bulls 113, Pacers 105

In Chicago, Zach LaVine scored 32 points in his return from the NBA's health and safety protocols, DeMar DeRozan added 24 and Chicago beat Indiana.

Nikola Vucevic had 16 points and 15 rebounds, The Bulls improved to 20-10) with their third straight victory. Assistant coach Chris Fleming directed the team with head coach Billy Donovan entering protocols Friday.

Caris LeVert scored 27 points for Indiana.

Nuggets 103, Clippers 100

In Los Angeles, Nikola Jokic had 26 points and 22 rebounds, rallying Denver past Los Angeles after the Nuggets blew a 17-point lead.

The Clippers were playing without Paul George. He's sidelined for up to a month

with an ulnar collateral ligament tear in his right elbow.

Brandon Boston Jr.'s potential tying 3-pointer was off the mark at the buzzer. Boston and Eric Bledsoe led Los Angeles with 18 points apiece.

Grizzlies 127, Kings 102

In Sacramento, Calif., Desmond Bane scored 28 points and Memphis beat Sacramento for the second time in 10 days.

Ja Morant had 18 points, nine assists and seven rebounds to help the Grizzlies end a three-game losing streak. Jaren Jackson scored 21 points.

Tyrese Haliburton had 18 points and seven assists for Sacramento.

Spurs 144, Pistons 109

In San Antonio, Keldon Johnson scored 27 points and San Antonio had its highest-scoring game of the season to beat short-handed Detroit, extending the NBA-worst Pistons' road skid to 10.

San Antonio has won three straight and four of five to move into 10th in the Western Conference.

Hamidou Diallo scored 28 points for Detroit.

Thunder 117, Pelicans 112

In Oklahoma City, Shai Gilgeous-Alexander scored 31 points, rookie Aaron Wiggins added a career-high 24 and Oklahoma City beat New Orleans.

Josh Hart had 29 points and 10 rebounds for New Orleans. The Pelicans had won four in a row.

NBA virus numbers still rising, expanded testing begins

By **TIM REYNOLDS**
AP BASKETBALL WRITER

The way Miami's Caleb Martin sees things, he's lucky.

He just missed seven games while completing the NBA's health and safety protocols related to the coronavirus, the worst of his symptoms being a couple days of fatigue. And when looking at the still-rising numbers of positive tests around the league right now, Martin offered a stark assessment.

"It almost seems it's inevitable," Martin said.

The numbers in the NBA indeed keep getting higher and may continue that way for the foreseeable future. Expanded testing, agreed to earlier this month, went into place Sunday for players who have yet to receive their booster shots. The new testing plan is expected to remain in place until Jan. 8, after weeks of urging by the league and the National Basketball Play-

ers Association for players to get boosted.

By early Sunday evening, the numbers of players known to be in the protocols was up to 116—and probably slightly higher, considering some teams had yet to update injury reports. Numbers can fluctuate quickly as players test in and out, and being on the protocols list does not always mean someone has tested positive.

"I think any logical person would worry how far is this going to go, and there's a couple teams that have quite a few people in the protocols. ... You don't know where it's going to go," San Antonio coach Gregg Popovich said.

Almost all NBA teams are dealing with at least one known case of virus-related issues now, and some teams are down to mere skeletons of what an NBA team should look like. Toronto played Cleveland on Sunday with eight players, four of them

hardship signings brought on because 10 Raptors are currently in the protocols.

"Shoutout all the guys filling in to keep this season going—from unknown guys to the vets," Raptors guard Fred VanVleet, one of the sidelined Toronto players, tweeted.

Here's what the Orlando injury report looked like on Sunday: Six players out because of virus-related problems, another sidelined while he completes the process of getting cleared from a protocols stint, and another six players out with injuries.

Yes, that's 13 players—from one team.

"You expect the unexpected," Magic coach Jamahl Mosley said.

Golden State's Draymond Green was the latest big name added to the protocols list on Sunday, less than 24 hours after the Warriors beat Phoenix in what was the best game on the league's five-game Christmas lineup and probably one

of the more anticipated games so far this season.

"This is the reality of this association right now," Miami coach Erik Spoelstra said.

Spoelstra was missing, among others, point guard Kyle Lowry, head athletic trainer Jay Sabol and assistant coaches Chris Quinn and Caron Butler on Sunday. Quinn was at the arena—just not in the arena. He was waiting in a parking garage, watching a stream of the game, hoping a confusing testing situation got cleared up in time for him to go to work.

It didn't.

Quinn probably could have coached Sunday and been fine, and Lowry told Spoelstra he felt like he could play. But Spoelstra said there's a far bigger point in the ongoing fight with the virus.

"This virus is so complex that it really isn't about us," Spoelstra said. "And then now you're dealing with the complexity of this new vari-

ant and if you've been fully vaccinated and have a booster shot and you feel fine ... then hopefully your return to play or return to work as a staff member can be quicker."

Talks between the NBA and the NBPA have been going on for several days about a potential shortening of the return-to-play protocols, though nothing has been finalized.

The Raptors hadn't played for more than a week. But the schedule said they were playing Sunday, so they showed up to play on Sunday.

"We haven't done a thing since our last game," Raptors coach Nick Nurse said about 90 minutes before tip-off.

In Chicago, where the Bulls just had 10 players go through protocols and are now without coach Billy Donovan as he navigates them, it had been pointed out that Lonzo Ball was the lone player to appear in every game for the team so far this season.

That streak is about to end:

Ball is one of three players on the latest list of Bulls in the protocols.

"Y'all jinxed me," Ball tweeted.

Memphis saw its protocols list grow to five on Sunday. San Antonio—one of the few teams that hadn't had a player in protocols of late—had its run of luck on that front end when Dejounte Murray was added to the list, and Atlanta added John Collins to its already-jammed list, now up to 10 players.

"It's a crazy virus. It really is," Spoelstra said. "It just brings out the worst in people. It can happen. The league, they have to make really tough decisions right now. I don't envy what they're having to do, but organizations are having to make tough decisions daily. Same thing with the players association and staffs."

"We just have to stay the course. The business is still moving forward. It's thriving. Everyday life is still moving forward. But you have to have the appropriate level of precautions and awareness as well."

Kansas City wins its 6th straight AFC West title



KANSAS CITY, Mo. (AP)—Patrick Mahomes threw for 258 yards and three touchdowns, Byron Pringle caught two of the TD passes, and the Kansas City Chiefs beat the Pittsburgh Steelers 36-10 on Sunday to clinch their sixth consecutive AFC West title.

The Chiefs (11-4) remained a game ahead of Tennessee for first place in the AFC with their eighth straight win. That would give them the conference's lone first-round bye and home-field advantage throughout the AFC playoffs.

Clyde Edwards-Helaire had a touchdown run for Kansas City before leaving early in the second half with a collarbone injury. Darrel Williams and Derrick Gore carried the load the rest of the way with Williams running for 55 yards and Gore adding 43 yards on the ground and three catches for 61 yards.

The Steelers became the first team in NFL history to trail by at least 23 points at halftime in three straight road games. Already on the playoff bubble, Pittsburgh (7-7-1) dropped further behind the Bengals (9-6) in the AFC North.

Ben Roethlisberger threw for 159 yards with a late fourth-quarter touchdown for Pittsburgh, along with throwing an interception and losing a fumble. Najee Harris added 93 yards rushing.

Cowboys 56, Washington 14

In Arlington, Texas, Dak Prescott threw four touchdown passes, DeMarcus Lawrence returned an interception for a score and Dallas celebrated clinching the NFC East title before kickoff with a rout of Washington.

The Cowboys (11-4) tied the franchise record for points in a first half while taking a 42-7 lead and frustrating Washington to the point that defensive tackles Jonathan Allen and Daron Payne scuffled on the sideline.

Dallas didn't need to win to add the division title to the playoff berth that was sealed with San Francisco's loss to Tennessee three nights earlier. Las Vegas' 17-13 victory over Denver took care of that about an hour before kickoff.

Prescott and company didn't seem to care, and scored the franchise's most points, playoffs included, since a 59-14 victory over San Francisco in 1980. Washington (6-9) allowed its most points since 2010 in the most-lopsided loss for either team in a storied rivalry played 123 times.

Buccaneers 32, Panthers 6

In Charlotte, N.C., Tampa



Kansas City Chiefs defensive tackle Jarran Reed, center, is congratulated by teammates Willie Gay Jr. and Alex Okafor (97) after recovering a fumble by Pittsburgh Steelers quarterback Ben Roethlisberger during the second half of an NFL football game Sunday, Dec. 26, 2021, in Kansas City, Mo.

Bay won its first NFC South title since 2007 when Tom Brady threw for 232 yards and a touchdown and Antonio Brown made a grand return to the NFL in a rout of Carolina.

In his first game since Oct. 13, Brown saw a prominent role on offense with Mike Evans and Chris Godwin sidelined by injuries, catching 10 passes for 101 yards while being targeted 15 times by Brady.

Ronald Jones carried 20 times for 65 yards and a touchdown filling in for the injured Leonard Fournette. Tampa Bay also got big offensive contributions from unheralded players Ke'Shawn Vaughn and Cyril Grayson.

The Bucs (11-4) put up 391 yards on offense, and on defense, had seven sacks and limited the Panthers to two field goals.

Rams 30, Vikings 23

In Minneapolis, Brandon Powell returned a punt 61 yards for a touchdown in the third quarter to lift Los Angeles into the playoffs in its win over Minnesota.

The victory also sent the Rams' NFC West rival Arizona Cardinals into the post-season.

Sony Michel rushed for a season-high 131 yards and a score for the Rams (11-4), while Matt Gay made three field goals, and the Aaron Donald-led defense did its part, keeping the Vikings out of the end zone on two first-half trips inside the 10-yard line.

Bills 33, Patriots 21

In Foxborough, Mass., Josh Allen threw for three touchdowns and Buffalo hung on to beat New England to vault the

Bills back into first place in the AFC East title race.

Buffalo (9-6) now holds tiebreakers over the Patriots and Dolphins, and is in the driver's seat to win its second straight division title. Allen finished 30 of 47 passes for 314 yards, and he also rushed 12 times for 64 yards.

Isaiah McKenzie stepped up in place of Bills receivers Cole Beasley and Gabriel Davis, who were both on the reserve/COVID-19 list, notching a career-high 11 catches, 125 yards and a touchdown.

Eagles 34, Giants 10

In Philadelphia, Jalen Hurts threw a touchdown to lineman Lane Johnson, linebacker Alex Singleton returned an interception for a score and Philadelphia continued its late-season playoff push with a win over New York.

The Eagles (8-7) have won six of eight after opening the season losing five of seven and moved into the seventh playoff spot in the NFC. They could clinch a playoff berth with a win and some help next week.

Hurts shook off a dismal first half and threw for 199 yards and two touchdowns to push the Eagles over .500 for the first time since they won the season opener. Philadelphia scored 31 points in the second half.

Bengals 41, Ravens 21

In Cincinnati, Joe Burrow threw for a franchise-record 525 yards and four touchdowns, and Cincinnati took sole possession of first place in the AFC North by beating a COVID-depleted Baltimore team.

Burrow, the second-year QB who broke Boomer Esiason's

team record of 522 yards, was 37 of 46 and threw two touchdown passes to Tee Higgins and one each to Tyler Boyd and Joe Mixon as the Bengals (9-6) swept the Ravens for the first time since 2015.

Tee Higgins had 12 receptions for a career-high 194 yards. Ja'Marr Chase caught seven for 125 yards, and Boyd had three catches for 85 yards.

Raiders 17, Broncos 13

In Las Vegas, Josh Jacobs rushed for 129 yards and Las Vegas came from behind to defeat Denver and stay relevant in the AFC playoff picture.

With the win, the Raiders (8-7) severely damaged the postseason chances for AFC West rival Denver (7-8), which dropped its third game in the last four.

Las Vegas quarterback Derek Carr completed 20 of 25 passes for 201 yards with one touchdown and an interception. Zay Jones had six receptions for 50 yards and Hunter Renfrow had three catches for 40 yards and one touchdown.

The Broncos had a 13-7 lead at halftime, but the Raiders took the opening drive of the second half 75 yards over nine plays. Jacobs' performance on the ground marked his first 100-yard rushing game of the season.

Falcons 20, Lions 16

In Atlanta, Matt Ryan threw a tiebreaking 12-yard touchdown pass to Hayden Hurst early in the fourth quarter Atlanta held on late to beat Detroit—and preserve its slim playoff hopes.

Foye Oluokun's interception of Lions fill-in quarterback Tim Boyle's pass at the

Atlanta 1 with 33 seconds remaining preserved the win. It was the first interception of the game for Boyle, who made his second career start as Jared Goff remained on the reserve/COVID-19 list.

Atlanta wide receiver Russell Gage's lost fumble with 2:18 remaining set up the Lions' last possession at the Atlanta 37. The fumble was forced by Jalen Reeves-Maybin and recovered by Dean Marlowe.

The Falcons (7-8) began the day knowing they had to win their final three regular-season games to protect hopes of making the playoffs. Ryan's 19-yard pass to rookie Kyle Pitts set up the go-ahead touchdown.

Bears 25, Seahawks 24

In Seattle, Jimmy Graham caught a 15-yard touchdown pass from Nick Foles with 1:01 remaining, Damiere Byrd made an acrobatic reception for the 2-point conversion, and Chicago Bears beat Seattle.

Making his first start since last season, Foles led the Bears 80 yards in the closing minutes, capping the drive with his TD toss to Graham, who spent three seasons with the Seahawks. Graham posted up a pair of smaller defensive backs to make the catch in the corner of the end zone.

On the 2-point attempt, Foles threw late, but Byrd got his knee down in the end zone with multiple Seattle defenders trying to push him over the back line.

It was a stunning conclusion to rare snow game in Seattle that eliminated the Seahawks (5-10) from the NFC playoff picture. Russell Wilson was

16 of 27 for 181 yards and two touchdowns.

Foles finished 24 of 35 for 250 yards for the Bears (5-10), and David Montgomery and Khalil Herbert each had rushing touchdowns.

Jets 26, Jaguars 21

In East Rutherford, N.J., Zach Wilson threw a touchdown pass and ran for another to outduel Trevor Lawrence, and short-handed New York used a goal-line stand at the end of the game to hold on and beat Jacksonville.

It was the fourth matchup of rookie quarterbacks taken with the first two picks in the draft—and the No. 2 selection came out on top. Barely.

After Eddy Pineiro's 20-yard field goal gave the Jets (4-11) a five-point lead with 1:47 remaining, Lawrence and the Jaguars (2-13) got the ball back. A 26-yard run by Lawrence got the ball to the 5, and he followed with a 4-yard pass to Marvin Jones. Lawrence spiked the ball to stop the clock to make it fourth-and-the-game.

But Lawrence's pass to Jones fell incomplete—and the Jaguars were called for an illegal shift that the Jets declined, turning the ball over on downs.

Wilson set a Jets record for a quarterback with 91 yards rushing, highlighted by a 52-yard score — the longest run by a QB in franchise history. He was 14 of 22 for 102 yards passing, including a TD pass to offensive lineman Conor McDermott. Braxton Berrios returned a kickoff 102 yards for a touchdown, and Michael Carter ran for 118 yards on 16 carries for New York.

Texans 41, Chargers 29

In Houston, Rex Burkhead ran for a career-high 149 yards and two touchdowns, and Houston took advantage of three turnovers to beat Los Angeles. Both teams were missing more than a dozen players because COVID-19 protocols.

The playoff chances for the Chargers (8-7), who entered in second place in the AFC West, took a serious blow with the loss to the lowly, if recently improved, Texans. Houston (4-11) had 16 players on the COVID-19 list but managed to win consecutive games for the first time this season.

Burkhead had TD runs of 25 yards and 1 yard as the Texans, who entered the game ranked last in the NFL in yards rushing, ran for a season-high 189 yards. Rookie Davis Mills threw for 254 yards and two touchdowns.

The Chargers' Justin Herbert threw for 336 yards with garbage-time touchdown and two interceptions. Justin Jackson ran for 64 yards and two touchdowns and had 98 yards.

Lipinski, Weir and White evaluate nationals and Olympics

By BARRY WILNER
AP SPORTS WRITER



So you think the Olympics frazzle the nerves more than any event? Well, how about just getting to the games?

Three of America's premier

skaters of yore—Olympic gold medalist Tara Lipinski, silver medalist Tanith White and three-time U.S. champion Johnny Weir—explain that the stress at the national championships can be as excruciating as anything the Olympics cause.

As U.S. skaters, led by three-time world champion Nathan Chen, and outstanding ice dance couples Madison Hubbell and Zach Donohue, and Madison Chock and Evan Bates, prepare for nationals during the first week in January in Nashville, they need to be aware of the pressure ahead.

"When you represent one of the big skating nations, the national championships almost feel more important than the Olympics at times," says Weir, who along with Lipinski and Belbin are the prime analysts for NBC's coverage of figure skating. "Because you are competing against very strong skaters for one of three spots. In terms of stress, the nationals in an Olympic year felt like a

mini-Olympics for me."

Adds Lipinski, the 1998 winner at the Nagano Games:

"The game plan is always different in an Olympic year. There is a lot strategy used in planning out a skater's Olympic quad. You hope to peak in the last season as you head into the games. The other seasons are used for preparation and experimenting with new elements or style, all in the hope that you evolve into the best version of yourself for the big event.

"If you are a favorite for the team, nationals is the place to get that last confidence boost before the Olympics. If you are a hopeful, it's a very intense event where you have to lay it all on the line; for many it's their last shot at their Olympic dream. The anticipation and anxiety of a national championships in an Olympic year is always at a palpably high level."

Maybe not so much for Chen or for the two ice dance duos who are among the world's elite. But a strong per-



Nathan Chen, of the United States, performs in the men's free skate program at the Skate America figure skating event Oct. 23, 2021, in Las Vegas.

formance in Nashville would be a boost heading into a month of preparation, practice and strategy for Beijing.

Hubbell/Donohue, who barely missed the 2018 Olympics podium, and Chock/Bates have been staples on the international scene for years. White, skating as Tanith Belbin with Ben Agosto during her competitive career, believes they still

will have to battle nerves.

"Physically, my experience was that the preparations for nationals are mostly the same in an Olympic season," she says, "but mentally, it can be a far bigger challenge than in non-Olympic years. The pressure to not only perform your best and place well but also qualify to the Olympic team is immense, and there's no avoiding that tension during

a championship weekend. At the hotel, in practice, backstage, you can't escape it. So you need to be sure you come to nationals equipped with practiced mental tools to help manage that stress, rather than trying to avoid it."

The United States doesn't have any other likely medals contenders, but simply the opportunity to participate in an Olympics is a tremendous incentive during a national championships. And there are several other Americans with Olympic experience: Bradie Tennell and Karen Chen among the women; Vincent Zhou and Jason Brown among the men; Alexa Knierim, who competed in Pyeongchang pairs with husband Chris and now partners with Brandon Frazier.

Weir likes the looks of the men's field.

"The three men who've proven themselves on the national and international stage, Chen, Zhou and Brown, in my opinion, are the best three skaters to represent USA at the Olympics," he says.

TRIBUNE SPORTS SCORES

NBA STANDINGS

EASTERN CONFERENCE

Atlantic Division

	W	L	Pct	GB
Brooklyn	22	9	.710	—
Philadelphia	17	16	.515	6
Boston	16	17	.485	7
Toronto	14	16	.467	7½
New York	15	18	.455	8

Southeast Division

Miami	21	13	.618	—
Washington	17	16	.515	3½
Charlotte	17	17	.500	4
Atlanta	15	17	.469	5
Orlando	7	27	.206	14

Central Division

Chicago	20	10	.667	—
Milwaukee	22	13	.629	½
Cleveland	20	13	.606	1½
Indiana	14	20	.412	8
Detroit	5	27	.156	16

WESTERN CONFERENCE

Southwest Division

Memphis	20	14	.588	—
Dallas	15	17	.469	4
San Antonio	14	18	.438	5
New Orleans	12	22	.353	8
Houston	10	23	.303	9½

Northwest Division

Utah	23	9	.719	—
Denver	16	16	.500	7
Minnesota	15	17	.469	8
Portland	13	19	.406	10
Oklahoma City	12	20	.375	11

Pacific Division

Golden State	27	6	.818	—
Phoenix	26	6	.813	½
L.A. Clippers	17	16	.515	10
L.A. Lakers	16	18	.471	11½
Sacramento	13	21	.382	14½

NFL STANDINGS

AMERICAN CONFERENCE

East

	W	L	T	Pct	PF	PA
Buffalo	9	6	0	.600	427	264
New England	9	6	0	.600	388	260
Miami	7	7	0	.500	285	312
e-N.Y. Jets	4	11	0	.267	276	449

South

Tennessee	10	5	0	.667	357	326
Indianapolis	9	6	0	.600	420	316
e-Houston	4	11	0	.267	248	401
e-Jacksonville	2	13	0	.133	217	396

North

Cincinnati	9	6	0	.600	410	324
Baltimore	8	7	0	.533	355	356
Pittsburgh	7	7	1	.500	301	371
Cleveland	7	8	0	.467	314	329

West

y-Kansas City	11	4	0	.733	421	306
L.A. Chargers	8	7	0	.533	408	411
Las Vegas	8	7	0	.533	316	387
Denver	7	8	0	.467	298	260

NATIONAL CONFERENCE

East

y-Dallas	11	4	0	.733	457	307
Philadelphia	8	7	0	.533	398	318
Washington	6	9	0	.400	297	407
e-N.Y. Giants	4	11	0	.267	248	365

South

y-Tampa Bay	11	4	0	.733	442	312
New Orleans	7	7	0	.500	313	285
Atlanta	7	8	0	.467	278	400
e-Carolina	5	10	0	.333	277	345

North

y-Green Bay	12	3	0	.800	383	324
Minnesota	7	8	0	.467	384	372
e-Chicago	5	10	0	.333	265	373
e-Detroit	2	12	1	.167	259	386

West

x-L.A. Rams	11	4	0	.733	416	326
x-Arizona	10	5	0	.667	394	306
San Francisco	8	7	0	.533	377	334
Seattle	5	10	0	.333	306	307

e-Eliminated from playoffs
x-clinched playoff spot
y-clinched division

BY THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

OREGON22

From Page 20

Athletics Association up to the World Athletics Council and Asics for taking a chance with our team. The CNMI never really has a chance to be on Olympic-caliber events and this is unbelievable. They are all excited and they very well should be. They'll basically get to see the same athletes from the Olympics go at it for their titles again," he said.

Kong thanked her lucky stars for agreeing to join Dela Cruz's team and now looks forward to meet her running idols next year.

"Yes I'm still in disbelief! I'm really excited to go to the world championships!

I'm quite proud to represent Oceania and am looking forward to this team endeavor, so happy to introduce more people to CNMI," said the Commonwealth Health Center physician.

Ditto for Necesito who added that aside from winning second runner-up in the adult category and Community Choice Award of this year's CNMI Got Talent 2021, going to the 2022 World Athletics Championships was an early Christmas gift.

"We're still shocked. I just woke up when I heard the news and I thought I was dreaming! Honestly, we are fortunate that we get an opportunity as big as this! This will also be an opportunity for me to see some of

the most famous athletes like Sha'carri Richardson and Usain Bolt! The fact that I'm also joining alongside my teammates makes me more than ecstatic!" said the Dan Dan Middle School teacher.

For University of Hawaii-Manoa student Lucido, getting selected to represent Oceania in the 2022 World Athletics Championships is a good opportunity to put Saipan on the athletics map.

"We are looking forward to whichever location whether it be Oregon or Canada, we would be open to both locations and it gives us an opportunity to proudly represent the CNMI."

Meanwhile, Northern Marianas College student Veloria

joked that Team NMI Run Saipan will be aiming for the gold medal in WCH Oregon22.

"I'm excited to show what I got and what my team would put out on the table, and hopefully, we would win gold in next year's world championships!"

Galang almost became the fifth Beagle of the group as he originally thought the competition in Eugene next year will conflict with his military training.

"Actually I do have military training end of July 2022 but it worked out it's after the world championships. So, I can be there for the event," he assured.

Galang said he's absolutely honored to be part of the team that's representing Oceania in

WCH Oregon22.

"Even if we had little preparation for the Ekiden I'm proud of how our team was able to push through and finish it. We're all excited to see the Asics World Championships next year, to see all the top athletes in the world," said the U.S. Army and Golds Gym Saipan trainer.

Last month, Team NMI Run Saipan finished 1,596th out of 5,952 teams that competed in the ASICS World Ekiden 2021 after completing the 42-kilometer virtual relay in a time of 4:43.46. By completing the race, the team entered a shortlist of teams that potentially could get a shot at taking part in the 2022 World Athletics Championships.

NMIVA

From Page 20

Tinian will be a secondary site for beach volleyball games," she said.

Quan admitted that playing the consolation matches on Tinian would require a little more effort in terms of logistics and coordination, but said her organization is glad to do the extra mile.

"It will require more planning and resources to execute the matches there, but with the help and support of Tinian Mayor Edwin Aldan and his team, we are confident that this will be a fun and exciting event for the Tinian community," she said.

The NMIVA head added she always looks forward to opportunities to grow the sport not only on Saipan but through-

out the Commonwealth.

"As the national federation for volleyball in the CNMI we are always looking for opportunities to bring the sport to our sister islands, Tinian and Rota," she said.

Pacific Mini Games Organizing Committee chief executive officer Vicente "Ben" Babauta earlier said aside from triathlon being held on Rota, Tinian will also be host-

ing the consolation matches for beach volleyball in next year's Mini Games.

"The main games will be on Saipan and then the consolation games will be on Tinian. Will probably bring 4-5 teams there. The matches that will be played there are for fourth, fifth, and sixth places," he said.

Beach volleyball is expected to draw 64 players in next year's Mini Games with major-

ity of the matches to be played at the expansive beach of Crowne Plaza Resort (formerly Fiesta Resort & Spa Saipan).

The Pacific Mini Games 2022 Organizing Committee said nearly 1,900 athletes and officials from 21 island nations have so far confirmed their participation in the quadrennial sports event the CNMI is hosting next year from June 17 to 25, 2022.

MORE

From Page 20

He even praised the 20 that didn't make the first cut for trying out and doing their best in the monthlong training, which included an arduous fitness regimen conducted by strength and conditioning coach Joey Tudela.

"Thank you for your time and effort coming out to the try-

outs. Unfortunately we are not able to select every individual that tries out for the team. We had so much talent that tried out and so much talent also still in the tryouts which makes it even more difficult to select the top 20. Overall we appreciate everyone's time in coming out and showcasing their skills," he said.

Cruz, along with CNMI national baseball team man-

ager Manny Sablan and coach Deron Flores, last week bared the 36 players that made the first cut and are continuing to try out for the Mini Games defending champions CNMI National Baseball Team.

They are the following: Pat Alepuyu, Dennis Cabrera, Jerold Cabrera, Diego Camacho, Devyn Flores, Juan Iguel, Ben Jones Jr., Darion Jones, Byron Kaipat, A.J. Lizama, Poland

Masaharu Jr., Franco Nakamura, John Peter Sablan, Nokki Saralu, Lorenzo Sebaklim, Nate Smith, Anthony Tenorio, Shane Yamada, Tyrone Omar, Joshua Jones, Jesus Iguel, Lamarc Iguel, Jordan Suel, Keoni Lizama, Brian Camacho, Nathan Camacho, Patrick Tenorio, Ze Lizama, Jose Lizama Jr., Jacob L. Babauta, Nate Guerrero, Angel Palacios, Eric Palacios, T.J. Cruz, Giovanni

Mira, and T.J. Dela Cruz.

With 136 expected players, baseball will be played at the Francisco "Tan Ko" M. Baseball Field, which has a planned facelift coming.

Aside from baseball, the other sports that will see action in next year Mini Games are athletics, badminton, beach volleyball, golf, outrigger canoe or va'a, tennis, triathlon, and weightlifting.



Heat win 3rd straight, pull away from Magic, 93-83

PAGE 17

Saipan Tribune Sports

Lipinski, Weir and White evaluate nationals and Olympics

PAGE 19



20 TUESDAY, DECEMBER 28, 2021

SAIPAN TRIBUNE



Dela Cruz



Galang



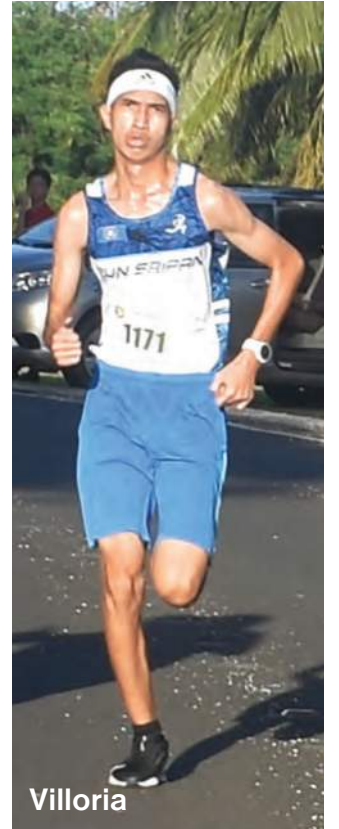
Kong



Lucido



Necessito



Villoria

Oregon22 selection excites Run Saipan

NMIVA happy Tinian will host consolation games

By MARK RABAGO
mark_rabago@saipantribune.com
ASSOCIATE EDITOR



The Pacific Mini Games will be coming to Tinian next year with beach volleyball playing its consolation matches on the island where the Enola Gay and Bockscar took off en route to Japan, which some his-

See NMIVA on Page 19

torians believe hastened the end of World War II.

Northern Mariana Islands Volleyball Association president Somia Quan said she's honored to bring the sport to Saipan's southern neighbor.

"The Pacific Mini Games is a special event for our CNMI community and we are happy that

Tinian will host consolation matches for the fourth, fifth, and sixth place teams for next year's Pacific Mini Games.

MARK RABAGO

By MARK RABAGO
mark_rabago@saipantribune.com
ASSOCIATE EDITOR

Team NMI Run Saipan punched a ticket to the 2022 World Athletics Championships set from July 15 to 24 next year in Eugene, Oregon.

Run Saipan president Edward Dela Cruz Jr. said until now he and his teammates still can't believe that they were selected to represent the Oceania region in WCH Oregon22.

"I'm just surprised and happy we were selected to represent the entire Oceania region. The entire team gets to go. I asked everyone in my Run Saipan track and field squad and the first five that responded were put on the team. I didn't tell them we might go to Eugene, Oregon," he said.

The Commonwealth Ports Authority's Aircraft Rescue

and Fire Fighting firefighter said that's why his teammates— Jenna Kong, Simon Necessito, Jalen Lucido, Sil-

drey Veloria, and Gerald Galang—got

the shock of their lives when they found out they're going to the 2022 World Athletics Championships.

"That was a surprise for them I told them after we participated in the relay. I wanted to see who really wanted to be on the relay squad from their heart. I would just like to thank coach Robin Sapong and everyone from Oceania

See OREGON22 on Page 19



'More difficult to select Top 20'

By MARK RABAGO
mark_rabago@saipantribune.com
ASSOCIATE EDITOR



With less than a month for the Saipan Baseball League to make its second and final cut to bring down the training team

pool to 20, coaches are already having sleepless nights about making that difficult decision.

CNMI national baseball coach Gary Cruz, for one, said all the 56 players that originally tried out for the team were talented.

See MORE on Page 19

CNMI national baseball coach Gary Cruz, standing second left, said trimming the national baseball training pool down to 20 will be more difficult than making the first cut.

MARK RABAGO

